



Three freedoms under a magnifying glass

Review of cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia 12- 25 February, 2021

Freedom of association, assembly and expression

- The long-standing practice of founding GONGO associations, which imitate civil society organizations with decades-long histories of activity with their name, visual identity, field of activity and in some cases style of work, has begun to be applied in the field of media. In early February 2021, in order to confuse the public and take advantage of others' work that has resulted in the creation of a recognizable brand, [a plagiarized version of the "Južne vesti" site appeared](#), which differs from the original in that it has the word "info" added to the email address. This site mostly publishes news with neutral content, except for those that directly concern the "Južne vesti" portal, and whose goal is to discredit that media outlet. The owner of the domain on which this portal is registered is Ivica Golubović, and at the address where his company is registered, there is also the headquarters of the companies "TV Super-Sat communication", but also "Global media broadcast d.o.o" and the Information Company "Info 24 Media d.o.o." whose owner is Marko Acimovic. A very indicative fact that indicates the intention to restrain the work of independent and objective local media with such moves is that the companies owned by Ivica Golubović and Marko Acimović belong to the network of media stations "Info 24 media d.o.o." whose president is Zoran Majdak, who carried out an identical action through that association in March 2020 when it comes to [the OzonPress portal from Čačak](#). The text published by the original portal OzonPress at the time states that Majdak and Acimovic were arrested in 2012 for organizing fake SMS quizzes and prize games through the illegal "People's radio". An attempt to steal the identity of the Valjevo portal Kolubarske.rs is also connected to the two of them, and for insults against the editor-in-chief of that portal Darija Ranković, Majdak was sentenced to a fine. They tried to carry out the same venture in Gornji Milanovac by stealing the identity of the GM Info portal, but they did not succeed, but their company "Info 24" received 11,850,000 dinars from the local authorities out of a total of 15 million planned. These data show that this is not a coincidence, but a systematic attempt supported by local authorities to take over and shut down local media. This process does not only mean taking over the

identity in order to create confusion, but also obtaining money in competitions for co-financing media projects, which phantom portals owned by people close to the ruling party existentially endanger the media with a long and decades-long tradition, leaving citizens without adequate opportunities, true and objective information.

- After more than two years since the commission of the crime and after numerous attempts to obstruct the procedure, the burning of the house of journalist Milan Jovanović finally got a [court epilogue](#). Vladimir Mihailović and Aleksandar Marinković were sentenced to four years in prison, or rather four years and three months in the case of Marinković, who is currently on the run. Dragoljub Simonovic, former president of the municipality of Grocka and a high official of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, was also sentenced to four years and three months in prison for inciting to commit a crime. Despite the sentences, the acting deputy public prosecutor announced he will be filing an appeal, believing that they were inadequately mild. Judge Slavko Zugic said after the verdict was pronounced and explained that he was under constant pressure from defense lawyers who accused him of bias, even of working on the orders of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, which he vehemently rejected. Although the first-instance verdict has just been passed, which can be appealed, this epilogue raises hope that it is possible to institutionally protect the right of journalists to physical integrity, but also to freely perform journalistic work, and that those who endanger those rights will not go unpunished.
- Contrary to their usual practice of overseeing only televisions with national frequencies, the Council of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) has decided to place [N1, Nova S and Al Jazeera TVs](#) under their supervision "as televisions with significant ratings". It is also stated that numerous irregularities were noticed in the show "Mentalno Razgibavanje" which was broadcast on Nova S television, the REM Council decided to inform the Luxembourg Independent Audiovisual Body (ALIA), EPRA, ERGA and OSCE. Formally, this procedure is justified by the fact that the license for the provision of media services to TV Nova S was issued by the Luxembourg Independent Audiovisual Body (ALIA). This cynical mention of the state of Luxembourg is a clear allusion to the accusations against N1 and Nova S constantly made by the highest representatives of the ruling party, as well as the President of the Republic, aimed at discrediting them in front of the domestic public and portraying these media as actors who do not respect the legal order of the Republic. Of Serbia. The decision to put these televisions under surveillance is obviously a political act, primarily having in mind the attitude of the authorities towards them, but also the ignorant attitude of the REM Council towards those televisions whose work they are obliged to control, which violate regulations and standards on a daily basis and on whom almost no sanctions have been imposed, let alone adequate ones. In that context, we should also look at the news that the [REM Council suspended the procedure against Pink TV regarding the threat of murder that was made during the broadcasting of reality programs on that television](#). The explanation of the decision states that the Council was guided by the decision of the competent prosecutor's office to reject the criminal report because it is a criminal act that is not prosecuted ex officio but on a private lawsuit. This argument clearly indicates that the members of the REM Council sought a reason why they would not do

what falls within the scope of their authority, and this very controversial argument was used for that purpose.

- [Sandzak Television](#) was again the only media in Novi Pazar that did not receive an invitation for the event on February 16, when Minister Tomislav Momirović was a guest in that city. This is not the first such case, which clearly indicates that this is not an accidental omission but a deliberate omission at the expense of this media outlet, which affects not only their right to do their job but also the public interest in the form of citizens' right to be informed. The Association of Journalists of Serbia appealed to the representatives of the local self-government unit to start respecting the Law on Public Information and Media, which explicitly prohibits the violation of the freedom of public information by abusing one's official position and public authority.
- The initiative of numerous civil society organizations to enable transparency of the procedure of amending the Law on Access to Information of Public Importance was supported by the lawyer and former Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, [Rodoljub Sabic](#). He pointed out that it is necessary to make available to the public the work plan of the Working Group established by the Ministry in order to work on the mentioned changes, as well as to enable the influence of undoubtedly competent CSOs in this procedure in order to avoid passing a law that would represent a step back compared to the law previously in effect in order to further complicate the way for the public to access information that is in the public interest.