

---

# 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

10-25 March, 2021

#### Freedom of association, assembly and expression

- Deputies from the ruling party [continued](#) their campaign against the KRIK editorial office and editor-in-chief Stevan Dojčinović. After numerous attempts to present [KRIK](#) as an extended arm of a criminal clan gathered around the arrested Veljko Belivuk, this time the Serbian Progressive Party MP Aleksandar Martinović accused them of being a criminal organization that launders money and does not pay taxes. Such rhetoric has met with numerous condemnations from the domestic and international public, and [Viola von Cramon](#), Member of the European Parliament and Rapporteur for Kosovo, was among the first to speak out. In her statement, she condemned the attacks on journalists and civil society and reminded of the provisions of the newly adopted code of conduct for people's deputies, pointing out that such an act grossly violated and made the code meaningless. [The Advisory Committee](#), as an advisory body to the European Parliament and the European Commission, also condemned the behavior of members of the ruling majority, stressing that the practice could have a negative impact on Serbia's EU accession. Concerns are also expressed about attempts to criminalize civil society organizations, the media and journalists, but an appeal to the Government to provide protection and provide conditions for the smooth operation of civil society and the media is also emphasized. The continuous attacks did not lead to an institutional reaction of the state of Serbia, but they did condition such a reaction by the European Parliament. For that reason, MEPs sent a new [amendment](#) to the Report on Serbia due to attempts to criminalize free media and civil society, but also another amendment which points to the fact that Radio Television of Serbia and the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media failed to regain public trust and they perform their tasks in accordance with the required standards. The long-standing practice of public targeting of dissidents by the ruling majority proves that sincere efforts have not been made in the field of improving the position of the media and civil society, but also respect for freedom of speech, but that the previous commitment has remained only has been dramatically narrowing for years.
- The struggle of the ruling majority MPs against free media [continued](#) with the procedure of proposing amendments to the Law on Electronic Media by MP Marjan Risticovic, which envisages astronomical fines for a member of the Regulatory Council if it does not determine that televisions licensed abroad (N1, Nova S, Sport klub) are not in line with the new legal definition. The expert public assessed the proposed changes as worrying because their adoption would almost prevent the work of certain media, and the threatened punishments would serve the

purpose of "disciplining" a number of REM Council members who have so far expressed a separate opinion on some issues. The news that this is not an individual statement, but an established practice is shown by the news that the [Parliamentary Committee](#) for Administrative-Budgetary and Mandate-Immunity Issues rejected the charges against Marko Atlagić, Vladimir Orlić, Aleksandar Martinović and Nebojša Bakarec for violating the Code of Deputies submitted by CRTA and Open Parliament. Moreover, it was stated that the submitted reports represent an abuse of the Code, but it was also stated by that body that the terms "Shiptars" and "Gypsies" are not offensive. Committee member Branimir Spasic went a step further, emphasizing that the Assembly must find a mechanism to defend itself against such attacks and to envisage sanctions for the applicants, which is probably unnoticed in comparative parliamentary practice. Such reactions of the authorities led the International Press Institute (IPI) and nine other organizations for the protection of media freedom to send [a letter](#) to the Government of the Republic of Serbia stating that the state reacted too quietly, fearing that such a campaign could lead to impunity and to an intensification of threats and violence. Although there were no institutional reactions in Serbia, attacks on the media and civil society, as well as the apparent lack of will of the authorities to deal with such practices, produced a reaction from media associations that withdrew from the Serbian Government Working Group on Security and Protection of Journalists. The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia, the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina, the Media Association, the Association of Online Media and the Business Association of the Association of Independent Local Media "Lokal Press" [resigned](#) from the Working Group. The government did not respond to their call for the Working Group to stand up as soon as possible and prevent further persecution of journalists and activists, but unfortunately this move did not lead to an adequate reaction from the authorities, but ended with an invitation to associations to reconsider their decision.

- The Council of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) has concluded that showing images of mutilated bodies during a press conference of the President, Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior on national frequency television has not led to public disturbance, which means that it does not require any reaction from the Regulatory bodies. The President of the REM Council, Olivera Zekić, [explained](#) that decision by the existence of public interest, emphasizing that the assessment was made on the basis of the votes of the majority of members of that body. Judita Popovic, a member of the REM, [points out](#) that she did not receive an answer to the question of which interest of any citizen is satisfied by showing those photos, which again indicates the indication that REM Council decisions are not made at that body's sessions, but outside that institution. In her [statement](#), Judita Popović pointed out that the publication of the photos violated the dignity of the victims and their families, but also that the criminal procedure itself, which is in progress by presenting the evidence, was compromised. The ignorant attitude of the REM Council towards obvious violations of the law by national frequency televisions clearly prove that last year's efforts in the inter-party dialogue in which the role of REM was especially emphasized did not yield the desired result and those additional reforms are needed.
- Activists of the Local Front Valjevo [initiative](#) were arrested on charges of obstructing an official in the performance of his duties by refusing to evacuate from the section of the road where the vehicle in which President Aleksandar Vučić was supposed to pass. On that occasion, two activists, Zeljko Trifunovic and Adam Radosavljevic, developed a banner on one part of the road that read "you are not welcome", and the arrest was made due to the refusal of the order by the police officer to remove from that part of the road due to the passage of a protected person. The statement does not state whether the persons offered active resistance, but it remains difficult to explain how it is possible for the physical integrity of the protected person to be endangered by placing a banner. The suspicion that this is political revenge is reinforced by numerous cases in which persons who placed banners with messages of support were not prosecuted, but that

arrests occur only in the case of expressing dissatisfaction and disagreement.