

# THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia April 23 - May 6, 2021



## Freedom of expression - N1 targeted with insulting banners once again

A banner with the words "Republic of Serbia, Goodbye; Welcome to Luxembourg" was hung again on the fence around the building where the editorial offices of CNN affiliate N1 television are located, alluding to the ownership structure of this broadcaster and the country in which it is allegedly registered. It should be noted that this is not the first time that N1 television employees have been faced with such harassment. Identical incidents have already happened in recent years, and the perpetrators have yet to be prosecuted, which is something that definitely contributes to their recurrence. Furthermore, it **should also be emphasized that the propaganda against this television with an allusion to the state of Luxembourg is not accidental, nor is it a product of the personal inspiration of the perpetrators of this crime, but the result of an organized campaign against this outlet by the highest state officials, such as the President, Minister of Defence, as well as ruling party representatives in the National Assembly.**

## Utility worker punished for speaking to TV

Saša Bigović, an employee of the state-owned electric utility power company EPS Serbia, was disciplined and removed from work by his employer for giving a statement to N1 television, in which he pointed out that his employer does not respect the provisions of the collective agreement on workers' rights. In his statement, Bigović said that workers who work

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Jugoslav Čosić @JugoslavCosicN1 ...

Na ogradu N1 ponovo postavljen transparent "Dobrodošli u Luksemburg" Dan nakon što je obeležen Dan slobode medija, na ogradi oko TV N1, koja gleda na Bulevar heroja sa Košara, ponovo je u utorak u popodnevnim satima okačen ... [rs.n1info.com](http://rs.n1info.com)

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overtime are not compensated as required by law and the agreement, but are instructed to sign a statement waiving that right without the possibility of appeal, with the option of compensating for overtime by receiving more days off work. In EPS' decision imposing the disciplinary measure on Bigović, he is accused of violating workplace safety regulations and company director's orders which prohibit filming and photographing an object that is marked as being of special importance for the country's security. This case is an open and gross violation of freedom of expression, and it also shows how confidently individual companies take steps to blatantly violate the law. In this particular case, authorities must react promptly, both because workers are being sanctioned for publicly expressing their views, as well as because of the obvious violation of workers' rights that the punished worker attempted to point to.

# Phantom and pro-gov't media awarded the most funds through public calls

Recently conducted competitions for co-financing of media projects by local governments in Smederevo and Bor again pointed to a major problem in the field of media financing and the lack of clear criteria and procedures that would allow for a fair distribution of funds, and prevent those funds from going into the hands of phantom media and those whose main reference is their political connection with the ruling party. What is characteristic of the competitions that were conducted in these cities is the strange fact that most of the allocated funds ended up in the bank accounts of media houses whose headquarters are outside those cities.

For example, out of the 28 million dinars provided by the competition in Smederevo, as much as 70% were received by media from other cities in Serbia, such as Television Copernicus from Niš, the company Energy save from Vršac or Radio Brus from Kovin. The situation is similar in Bor, where the largest amount of funds was awarded to media registered in Belgrade, Zaječar and Negotin, while the local media from that city were left without funds. Outlets from Belgrade also received the most money at the competition announced by the city administration of Valjevo.

**These are companies owned by Zoran Majdak, a man whose name is associated with dubious projects involving the establishment of phantom local media that completely take over the visual identity and names of independent outlets with decades-long histories. It is also indicative that Zoran Majdak is openly connected with the ruling party, and that the phantom media established in this way have regularly received huge funds from the budgets of local self-government units in recent years.** These cases, which are a continuation of a multi-year trend, show that there is a well-developed matrix for the misuse of regulations and, ultimately, the misuse of public funds. **Such actions are not only harmful to public finances, but above all endanger the financial survival of local media, which are left without access to public funds and therefore without means to continue their functioning.**



## Prosecutor in important media case removed suddenly

**Predrag Milovanović**, the deputy public prosecutor who had been handling the case of **Milan Jovanović**, the journalist whose house was set fire to in December 2018, has been "relieved of his duties as Deputy Public Prosecutor" through a personal, unelaborated decision by Republic Public Prosecutor **Zagorka Dolovac**. As was stated, Milovanović was relieved of his prosecutorial duties in order to fully dedicate himself to performing the function of a member of the State Prosecutors' Council (DVT), to which he was elected at the end of last year. However, according to law, there is no obligation for the Deputy Prosecutor to be dismissed, ie "released" from their duty to act in ongoing cases during the performance of their function in the State Council - this is prescribed only as a possibility. Out of the six newly elected members of the DVT, only one other person has been dismissed from the position of deputy prosecutor, while four members will continue to prosecute their ongoing cases at the discretion of prosecutor Dolovac. This sudden decision jeopardizes the verdict by which the former president of the municipality of Grocka, Dragoljub Simonović, and his associates were found guilty of setting fire to the house of journalist Jovanović. During the first instance proceedings, defendant Simonović threatened Milovanović that "after these proceedings, maybe he will no longer be a prosecutor", which is why the decision to dismiss Milovanović without explanation and despite his explicit request to continue working on this important media case is a cause for concern.

# MONITORING

**ВРАЊСКЕ** INFO TEMA DANA POSLEDNJI BROJ ARHIVA MARKETING

**POVERENICA: Vranjski SNS da se JAVNO IZVINI uredniku INFO VRANJSKIH**

06.05.2021 12:11

Izvor: Vranjske

Ilustracija FOTO Info Vranjske



## *Local ruling party officials ordered to apologize to journalist by the Equality Commissioner*

After the months-long campaign that the municipal board of the Serbian Progressive Party in Vranje led against the editor-in-chief of the Info Vranjska portal, Saša Stojković, the first official institutional response came in the form of The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality Brankica Janković issuing an official opinion with a recommendation, stating that the public announcements by local authorities in Vranje violated the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, which is why a recommendation was issued ordering a written apology to journalist Stojković. Undoubtedly, the reaction of Commissioner Janković is an encouraging move, but it is still questionable as to what extent this initiative will be implemented, bearing in mind that the law does not provide adequate mechanisms to ensure the implementation of the Commissioner's recommendations. **The practice so far shows that state bodies, as well as other actors to which similar recommendations have been issued by the Commissioner, or other independent institutions, have generally not been known to follow them.**

## *New Freedom House report: Serbia ruled not a democracy for the second year in a row*

In its latest report, Freedom House has once again classified Serbia in the category of hybrid regimes, which has left Serbia outside the category of democratic countries for the second year in a row. The report indicates that there is a serious crisis in Serbia when it comes to the rule of law and democratic institutions, and the area in which the biggest decline was recorded is the implementation of the election process in June 2020, when citizens had limited choices due to a large subset of the opposition boycotting the process in response to inadequate election conditions. **The existence of a crisis of democracy in Serbia is also confirmed by the latest report of the Council of Europe**, which especially emphasizes the problematic situation in the field of media. The report states that, despite a solid legal framework, the practice records worrying trends in the frequent use of hate speech, which leads to the frequent spread of intolerance and tensions in society. The media heavily contribute to this process, as they strive for sensationalist reporting which often crosses lines and spreads inaccurate news and misinformation. Such reports are just a further confirmation of the worrying situation in Serbia that has not seen any positive progress for years. **Although the focus of these reports is on media freedom and freedom of expression, the creation of such an unfavorable social climate fundamentally jeopardizes the exercise of all other rights and freedoms that should be guaranteed in democratically governed societies.**