

JUNE 18 - JULY 1, 2021

THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia June 18 - July 1, 2021



Freedom of expression – Journalist threatened over Facebook

The journalist of the daily "Danas", **Gojko Vlaović**, filed a criminal complaint with the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime due to threats sent to the account of the editorial office of that newspaper. Namely, during a discussion with an unknown man on the social network Facebook, threats of violence were sent to him and his colleagues, as well as accusations that they were foreign mercenaries who would end up in prison because of that. Despite warnings on Vlaović's part, the threats and insults continued, forcing the journalist to seek protection from state authorities. Although in this particular case the perpetrator is an individual acting alone, it is important to emphasize that such cases are only a consequence of the years of atmosphere of intolerance and conditions in which dialogue is no longer seen as a priority means of overcoming differences.

Death threats to journalist over stance on Srebrenica

Marko Vidojković, a writer and one of the authors of a podcast broadcast on Nova S television, received death threats after he stated in one of the episodes of the show that genocide was committed in Srebrenica in July 1995. The television's parent company has initiated criminal proceedings, and numerous domestic and international organizations have also given statements. Taking into account the seriousness of the threats, the international organization Reporters Without Borders spoke out about considering the possibility of police protection for Vidojković, bearing in mind that these are threats that directly endanger his life. The Government's Working Group for the Safety of Journalists also spoke out about this case. According to them, during the meeting of the Working Group, which was also attended by international organizations, the Deputy Republic Public Prosecutor Branko Stamenković informed the attendees about the details of the case as well as the steps taken by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Prosecutor's Office. A few days after the threats were sent, it was determined through IP checks that the threats were sent from Austria, which is why Interpol will be included in the investigation of this case. **This case of restriction of freedom of expression and endangerment of journalists due to the views they express is a consequence of many years and decades of creating an environment in which it is undesirable to express views on war crimes from the past, as well as the inconsistent behavior of the political elite when it comes to their condemnation.**

Freedom of assembly - Presidential security confiscates banners

Members of the "Cobra" unit, the official security detail of the President of the Republic, temporarily confiscated the banners with which Suzana Đorđević and Aleksandra Kostić wanted to protest against the arrival of Aleksandar Vučić in Kragujevac for the inspection of weapons and military equipment. One of the banners read "Girl means courage", referencing recent incidents in which President Vučić, during a sharp verbal discussion with representatives of one opposition party called his opponents girls, while the other banner read "You are not welcome". These women's initial idea was to express their protest in such a way that they would raise the banner when the President passed by them, which, in conjunction with the objective characteristics of these banners printed on plain paper, clearly indicates that the president's security could have in no way been endangered. For that reason, the reaction of the members of the security was inappropriate and excessive and was carried out in order to determine the content of the banners and the intentions of the gathered citizens, and to plan further movement of the president so as not to be near those banners. **In that way, the freedom of expression of these two citizens was endangered, as they were prevented from adequately expressing their opposition to the policies and moves of the current president. This also represents a violation of the right to peaceful assembly, which as one of its most important postulates implies the "sight and sound" principle, which dictates that assembly participants must be ensured the right to communicate their demands and messages within "sight and sound" of their intended audience.**

Freedom of association - MP repeatedly targets independent journalists as "foreign mercenaries" and "traitors"

The MP of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, Biljana Pantić Pilja, attacked the journalists of the Nova S portal and television once again, calling them domestic traitors and foreign mercenaries. The reason for this renewed attack was the news that the management of the newly established daily newspaper "Nova" will be printing the daily circulation of these newspapers in Croatia in the coming period due to the impossibility of doing so in Serbia. Instead of using this to open a discussion on the issue of how the production of daily newspapers has been made almost impossible in Serbia outside of established and regime-friendly outlets, the MP used this fact to launch a new series of insults and dangerous labels at independent journalists. The absence of any legal or political sanctions for her previously publicizing such accusations on the floor of the National Assembly over six months ago clearly served as encouragement for this move on Pantić Pilja's part. The fact that her statement was deleted shortly afterwards does not affect the essence of the problem, especially since it could be noticed that its announcement was approved by the mayor of Novi Sad Miloš Vučević and MP Sandra Božić, and that no officials condemned or apologized for this case. **Despite declarative efforts to create a supportive environment for the work of the media, the real situation can be read through the real conditions in which the media work, as evidenced by the forced printing of newspapers in another country, as well as the non-sanctioning and even support for such unacceptable speech against media by government officials.**

MONITORING

The Case of "the List" - Government simulates dialogue in drafting the National risk assesment on non-profit vulnerability to terrorist financing

A group of civil society organizations pointed to the simulation of dialogue by the state in the preparation of the National Assessments of the Non-Profit Sector's Vulnerability to Terrorist Financing and requested an urgent halt to this process until the responsibility for the "List" case is established - a case of overstepping by the Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing, which sent a request to commercial banks a year ago to provide them with insight into the financial transactions of a large number of CSOs, activists and journalists due to the alleged existence of grounds for suspicion that the money laundering process is carried out through their activities. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and the Terrorist Financing Risk Assessment Working Group have invited CSOs to complete the Terrorist Financing Vulnerability Assessment Questionnaire. This call was not preceded by a previous presentation of the purpose and goal of the assessment process, as well as the methodology of data collection and the manner of their further use. This approach clearly indicates that the procedure is not sufficiently inclusive and transparent from the very beginning, which is why the declared intention that "the final risk assessment will be a joint result of the work of all institutions and civil society organizations" is rightly called into question. We remind you that CSOs have repeatedly demanded that the competent authorities establish responsibility for all activities related to the case of the "List", and above all provide an explanation to the public on what legal basis these activities were undertaken, what circumstances were grounds for suspicion for specific associations and individuals found on the list, as well as the public announcement of the fact that no irregularities were found after the inspections. In addition, due to the reputational damage incurred due to this unprofessional treatment, CSOs demanded that the Administration take adequate measures to eliminate that damage in order to restore trust, which is crucial for further cooperation between the Administration and civil society in this area. Furthermore, the Committee of the Council of Europe MONEYVAL warned Serbia that it must not abuse the fight against terrorist financing to suppress legitimate CSO activities. At the session of this body earlier this year, it was determined that financial-intelligence bodies, such as the Administration, do not have the right to request sensitive information from banks about their clients, i.e. about CSOs, in such an arbitrary way. Also at that session, it was explicitly stated that the non-profit sector must be involved in the process of risk assessment of terrorist financing on a voluntary basis, and not by abusing the authority of the Administration, which was a response to the Serbian Government's explanation that the purpose of requesting data from banks was to conduct a strategic analysis of the non-profit sector before starting the process of making new risk assessments. **In this regard, it can be said that the state of Serbia has continued to ignore the conclusions of MONEYVAL and international standards in this area and still does not recognize civil society as a relevant and legitimate partner in the development of strategic documents.**