

THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia 14 - 27 January 2022



Freedom of expression – Journalist Pero Jovovic Threatened Again

Nova.rs journalist Pero Jovovic was again threatened with death via the *Instagram* social network. On this occasion, Jovovic stated that he was afraid for his safety, as well as that he was trying not to "live in paranoia, but that he was not feeling comfortable". Jovovic also added that only a month earlier, he had received one death threat in which he was told that he would be attacked when he returned to his hometown. He also stated that the same people have been sending him messages for some time, but that in most cases they are people whose profiles are locked, or hiding behind pseudonyms. Although he addressed the competent authorities regarding previous threats, in December 2020 and October 2021, Jovovic stated that he does not know how far the investigations have reached, although he was told in the competent prosecutor's office that he will be informed. According to the data obtained by the Cenzolovka portal, the Republic Public Prosecutor's Office has formed two cases regarding threats to Jovovic, and these cases are ongoing.



Source: Nova.rs

Freedom of Association – New Pressure on Environmental Associations and International Donors

At a press conference held on January 20, 2022, on the Government's decision to annul legal acts related to the lithium exploitation project in Loznica, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia Ana Brnabic made accusations against environmental associations and activists, as well as international donors. In the already established way officials deal with environmental activists, this time Brnabic paid special attention to international donors, whom she called "hypocritical". She stated that the mentioned "hypocrisy" is reflected in the fact that foreign donors directly participate in the formation of environmental associations and finance their work, and then finance environmental protests, which are directed against companies coming from the same countries where these donors are based. According to Brnabic, the "hypocrisy" is also reflected in the fact that the protests are aimed at "breaking the spine" of Aleksandar Vucic, while donors at the same time know that the President of Serbia will "push for those projects". The embassies of the United States of America, Germany and Great Britain first reacted to these accusations with a joint statement, and then international foundations individually, completely rejecting these accusations. Among other things, the embassies stated that this was a "harmful accusation" which is "especially difficult to understand", considering the cooperation they have with the Government and the National Assembly on the reform process and establishing democratic institutions. Also, the USAID office in Serbia pointed out that donation agreements completely exclude the possibility of using funds for protests or political activities, that USAID has been cooperating with every Serbian government in the past two decades and that "any suggestion that something contrary is happening is considered absurd."

MONITORING

Human Rights Watch Reminding on Attacks on Journalists in Serbia during 2021

In its latest report on the human rights situation in Serbia / Kosovo, the Human Rights Watch recalled attacks on journalists in Serbia, saying journalists had been threatened, followed by a weak response from Serbian authorities. The report states that the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) recorded 1 physical attack and 20 threats against journalists in the period from January to August 2021. The report recalls the case of journalist and host of the show *Dobar, los, zao* Dasko Milinovic, who was attacked with tear gas by two men in Novi Sad while on his way to work. At the time of writing, court proceedings were still ongoing. The report also recalls the case of journalist Vojislav Milovancevic from the nova.rs portal, who received threatening messages in January 2021, including death threats after reporting a case of rape allegedly committed by a priest employed at the Orthodox Theological Faculty. The report also reminded of the case of death threats against journalist and professor Dinko Gruhonjic, but also of the campaign against the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK), which endangered the editorial office of this portal. The campaign is said to have been led by TV Pink and several tabloids close to the authorities, which linked KRIK to criminal clans and accused them of tax evasion.

The Pressure on Environmental Activists Continues, As Well As the Physical Attacks to Which They Are Exposed

Due to the absence of police officers who would protect the right to peaceful assembly of citizens, at the environmental protests and roadblocks held on January 15, 2022, several people were physically attacked. Thus, at the roadblock in Preljina, one driver first tried to break the blockade, during which he hit several people, and then got out of the car and started a discussion with those gathered. After this incident, another driver tried to break the blockade. Eyewitnesses state that non-uniformed members of the police did not react, but that they recorded the events all the time. In Sabac, a man tried to break through the blockade, injuring a person who was given emergency medical care. At the same time, the police in Nis identified 20 people as organizers of unregistered public gatherings and initiated appropriate proceedings against them, for which they face fines in the amount of 100,000 to 150,000 dinars. Many of those who received these charges claim that they "have nothing to do with it" and ask "the police to present valid evidence".