

ELECTIONS

UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

41

days
until the
elections



human
rights
violations

DATE: 21/02/2022

The Three Freedoms Platform will monitor and record all irregularities in public information and the election process on a daily basis, and send its reports to the international community and the interested public.

Repeated Accusations made by the Interior Minister against Activists

Interior Minister Aleksandar Vulin, using the already known discourse on "foreign mercenaries", accused the organizer of the protest from February 15, 2022, in front of the Palace of Serbia, Sava Manojlovic, that his protest "cost the state about 333,000 euros". According to the announcement of the Ministry of the Interior, Manojlovic was marked as "Soros's man", and the participants in the protest as "allegedly gathered because of some environment". It is stated that the gathered "attacked" the President of Serbia, as well as that they gathered to prevent the arrival of important people at the award ceremony on the occasion of Serbian Statehood Day. The statement states that Minister Vulin "understands" Sava Manojlovic because he "received a million from Soros a few days ago", that he was "financed by Rockefeller", and that Manojlovic "must justify the money he received". **Such statements by the Minister of the Interior represent the continuity of pressure and verbal attacks faced by activists in Serbia, who are described by the highest state officials as "foreign mercenaries", "traitors" and "Soros people".**

Four Incidents at the Protest in Front of the Palace of Serbia

According to the information published by media, at the environmental protest held on February 15, 2022, near the Palace of Serbia in Belgrade, four traffic incidents occurred in which unknown persons, in their cars, attacked those gathered who blocked the roads. One of the videos related to the incident shows an unknown person, hitting the protester with the front part of the car, and then accelerating with the car all the time, carrying the victim on the hood. As the non-uniformed police officer announced after the incident, the driver of the mentioned car was arrested. Citizens who gathered that day resented the Ministry of the Interior for the absence of the police who would take care of the safety of the participants, considering that similar incidents took place at previous rallies, and despite appeals, the Ministry of the Interior refused to provide safety measures for protesters.

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Opposition Parties Cite Difficulties in the Signature Verification Process

Djordje Miketic from the "Moramo" Coalition claimed that there was a mass cancellation of verifiers and notaries public, which is why this coalition is experiencing difficulties in the process of collecting signatures in support of their list for the upcoming elections. Miketic stated that signatures of support will be collected at only 7 of the originally 14 planned locations in Belgrade due to the impossibility of notaries public and verifiers to go out on the field. He also stated that he was informed by the notaries that they cannot be available in full capacity due to public holidays and reduced work capacity, and cites as a special difficulty certain places outside Belgrade, where only one location for collecting signatures is planned, which will not work due to inability of notaries to go out on the field. As an example, Miketic cites the Municipality of Topola, to which a request was sent the day before, and which replied that it was unable to respond due to the small number of verifiers available, although, as Miketic states, "the municipality is full of verifiers for the Serbian Progressive Party". On this occasion, the Public Notary Chamber also announced that all notary offices are working at full capacity, that employees are going to the field in the order of receipt of requests, and that no cases of dismissal have been recorded. The opposition list "*Marinika Tepic - United for the Victory of Serbia*" also had objections to the work of notaries public, from which they stated that the process of collecting signatures was slowed down due to the small number of notaries who went to the field.

Citizens Report Cases of Pressure on Voters

During the process of collecting signatures in support of the Serbian Progressive Party's list for the upcoming elections, citizens recorded and published information on pressure on voters. A photo was published on a Facebook page showing a large group of citizens in front of the local SNS headquarters in Cacak, with a description that they were employees of a local public company, whose names are publicly called out, after which they enter the room. The *Citizens' Front of Vlasotince* posted on its Twitter profile a photo of a series of messages sent to citizens by a person presumed to be from the SNS, inviting citizens and members of their families to bring their ID cards to "prepare papers" for the signature verification process. In the messages that followed, citizens were informed about the time when they have to come "to the party" to sign and who to contact for their scanned ID card. Vesna Kovacevic from Blace was asked to collect safe votes for the Serbian Progressive Party by the head of the public company in which she is employed. Kovacevic, who became known to the public after announcing that she was forced to join the ruling SNS in order to get a job, said she refused to collect safe votes, although she was told the number of safe voters collected provided "points for extension of her employment contract".

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On Twitter, two videos were published: the first from Smederevo, which shows two unknown persons visiting residents of that city, and for whom the person who posted the video claims to be from the SNS, and the second from Loznica, and a person who published a video claiming that a local councilor and a notary public from that city were on it.

Verbal and Physical Attacks on Activists in Novi Sad

A group of activists from Novi Sad were verbally attacked in the "Alo" tabloid in an article published on February 17, 2022, and then physically the next day. In the article published in the mentioned tabloid, activist Brajan Brkovic is mentioned as a "traitor", "foreign mercenary", "terrorist", "madman" and many other names, as well as "working to overthrow the state". A group of civil society organizations from Vojvodina condemned this article about Brkovic, stating that the only reason behind these attacks is that Brkovic is resisting the current regime through activism. Only a day later, a group of activists from the Youth Student Action (YSA), whose member is also Brkovic, were attacked on the Liberty Bridge in Novi Sad while standing near a hate graffiti at that location, with the inscription "Serbs on willows" written below it and signed by the YSA. Brkovic states that they found out about this graffiti from a local media close to the ruling SNS, that they reported the case to the police, and that they then went to paint it over. During the painting, they were approached by three men who physically attacked them after a brief verbal incident.

Brkovic claims that they were attacked by the same group that caused the incidents and threw stones at the people gathered during the December protest blockades in that city.

Public Officials and Members of the Serbian Progressive Party Actively Pressuring Citizens

In the last few days, public officials and members of the Serbian Progressive Party have been conducting an active verbal campaign on social networks, against opposition-minded citizens. Thus, Prime Minister Ana Brnabic, commenting on the news about the support that the vice-rector of the University of Belgrade, Ratko Ristic, gave to an opposition group, made accusations against him. On this occasion, Ristic replied that "it is worrying that the Prime Minister of a government is commenting on the free will of an ordinary man in Serbia." A special target was environmental activist Savo Manojlovic, who received insulting messages from Defense Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic and SNS Presidency member Vladanka Malovic. This series of verbal attacks is only part of a continuous campaign against activists, as well as opposition-minded citizens, aimed at discrediting them and exerting pressure from the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, which is intensifying in the atmosphere of the election campaign.

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Thirteenth Attack on the Pride Info Center

The Pride Info Center (PIC) in Belgrade announced that their premises in the center of Belgrade were attacked by a man in the evening of February 17, 2022. It is stated that the man entered the PIC premises, broke inventory and threatened the employees who were at work at that time. It is also stated that the security responded immediately and removed the attacker from the room, but that the attacker continued to threaten and kick the front door. The attacker was then arrested by the police, and the PIC states that they received information that the attacker was soon released. The PIC reminds that the previous 12 cases of attacks have not been fully processed, that there is no reaction from official institutions after the attack, and called on the institutions to react, especially recalling the upcoming EuroPride to be held from 12 to 18 September 2022 in Belgrade. The Ministry of Interior published an announcement the following day saying that it will submit a request for initiating a misdemeanor proceeding against the suspected attacker.

Student Stefan Karanovic, who is Leading Several Cases Against the Faculty of Law in Novi Sad, Attacked

A suspended student of the Faculty of Law in Novi Sad, Stefan Karanovic, was attacked in the morning hours of February 19, 2022. Karanovic states that three men stopped him while he was running, and who attacked him after a short verbal incident, threatening him with death.

He alleges that he managed to escape across the field to the nearby gas station, where he called the police, who soon arrested one of the attackers. Karanovic is in numerous disputes with the Faculty of Law in Novi Sad, which suspended him for 36 months and which refuses to issue Karanovic a certificate of passed exams, after they expressed suspicions that Karanovic was behind a series of texts on alleged corruption at this faculty. He was previously threatened with death, after the Administrative Court ruled in his favor and thus annulled the disciplinary measure by which he was removed from the faculty.

Activists of the Ruling Serbian Progressive Party Threatened

According to media reports, the stand of the Serbian Progressive Party in Batajnica was attacked during the previous week by one person, who was soon arrested. As it is stated, the attacker first verbally clashed with the activists of the Serbian Progressive Party, who worked on a promotional stand in that city as part of the election campaign, and then painted the front part of the stand. Members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs arrested the attacker, who was sentenced to 4 months of suspended imprisonment on February 20, with a guilty plea.

