

THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia 1 - 14 April 2022



Freedom of expression

– Journalist Verica Marincic faced with threats

Verica Marincic, journalist of the “IN Medija” portal from Indjija, received threats after she wrote about a case of a local priest who was removed from a store by the police for rejecting to pay his bill. Marincic assumed that she received threats from a man from Beocin and that she informed the Permanent Working Group for Journalists’ Safety about it. She stated that she perceived the threats seriously, that she lives near Beocin and that the man who threatened her would not find it hard to find her address as her enterprise is registered on her home address. She also stated that this kind of threats come for the most banal things and that an “aggression for every spoken word” is happening. She said that she did not expect any reaction from competent institutions as those were absent in the past when she needed protection. Still, she reported the case and the member of the Working Group and lawyer in the Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia (NUNS) Rade Djuric stated that the case was reported to the Prosecutors’ Office for High Tech Crime.

Journalist not allowed to enter SNS premises in Nis

“Danas” journalist Vesna Torovic was not allowed to enter the Serbian Progressive Party Nis City Board premises by members of this party on 3 April 2022. It was stated that she introduced herself as a journalist and that she arrived to gather information on the elections, but she was told that “there was nobody from the management and that it was strictly forbidden to allow anyone who was not a party member inside”, after which they closed the doors in front of Torovic.

Journalist from Nis facing persecution for publishing a caricature

Journalist, activist and editor of the “Nis Initiative” portal Srdjan Nonic was interrogated by the police for a caricature he published on his personal Facebook profile. It is stated that Nonic made a caricature on which the Nis policeman Marko Petrovic can be guessed to be on it. Nonic told that he was asked in the police station if he “presented danger to life” of the policeman, and after he told that it cannot be assumed with certainty that the policeman was drawn on the caricature, the policemen said that they „knew on who he was thinking“. After interrogation, Nonic asked the Basic Prosecutor’s Office for which criminal offence he was charged, but he never received an answer. Nonic is sending in reports for years on abuse of power by local officials, but he was also reporting in threats and attacks he faced because of his activism. He stated that none of the reports had a positive epilogue. At the end, it was stated that the police interrogated one more person who commented on Nonic’s caricature. The policeman was known to the public earlier after opposition parties reported that he was the one who signed numerous misdemeanor reports against participants of environmental protests in Nis, that were later annulled by the Misdemeanor Court due to unlawful gathering of data for the charges.



Photo: NUNS, Facebook profil Srdana Nonića

N1 journalists attacked by private security

Journalist Vanja Djuric and cameraman Ivan Zugic from N1 TV were verbally attacked on 14 April 2022 in Belgrade during an interview. As it is stated in an official statement from the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS), N1 journalists were attacked in the vicinity of a bank, when the private security of the bank approached them with threats and insults. Journalists stated that they were standing on public space, where they had scheduled an interview. Soon after, a man from private security approached them, who was told by journalists that they did not record the bank and that the camera pointed in another direction. Despite this, the security continued threatening, because of which journalists assumed he had a problem with N1 TV specifically. Because of threats and insults, the recording had to be stopped until the attacker left. NUNS condemned this attack, stating that this type of attack can lead to physical assaults, which is a consequence of targeting journalists by public officials. Because of that, NUNS called for a stop of this practice and enabling journalists to do their work without interruptions.

Freedom of assembly - *Journalists charged with unlawful organizations of assemblies*

Three journalists from the Sombor "SOinfo" portal are being charged for an unlawful organization of an assembly during a set of environmental protests in this city in December 2021. As it is stated, journalists Sava Majstorov, Sara Mikic and Danijel Mirkov are under suspicion of organizing a protest on 4 December 2021, during which violations of public order and peace took place from the journalists' side, without a prior reporting of the assembly to the Ministry of the Interior. Journalists stated that the police took as evidence against Majstorov and Mikic news written by them from the mentioned portal, which were in fact protest announcements or reports from it. As evidence against Mirkov, the police stated a photography with a "blockade" inscription and news from another portal, which Mirkov published in a Facebook group. Journalists stated that policemen recorded their movement on the protest, and that they were summoned to the police station where they were told that they have been identified as protest organizers and that they will conduct misdemeanor if they organized it without reporting it to the police in proper time. Policemen were told by journalists that they did not have anything with the protest organization and that they would be there for business, that is private reasons.

Freedom of association

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Opposition Politician Pavle Grbovic physically attacked

President of the Movement of Free Citizens Pavle Grbovic was physically assaulted by Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) activists on election day of 3 April 2022, during which he received bodily injuries.

Grbovic stated that he saw several persons in vicinity of the ballot station on which he voted, from which one of them held a list that, according to that person, was acquired „from the party“. He further stated that they filmed these persons and followed them to SNS premises in which, according to Grbovic, SNS activists were stationed with a parallel electoral roll. The clash happened after a second group of SNS activists arrived on the location. Grbovic stated that they first attacked Nina Stojakovic from the Movement, a then they attacked him, after which a turmoil happened in which several persons participated, two of them attacking Grbovic. The police arrived after the third call and after already being called previously since Grbovic's arrival on the scene. Grbovic also stated that policemen were disagreeable, that the police team rejected to enter SNS premises in which the law was being broken, while a policeman told him that "he should have protected himself better". Because of the police not wanting to cooperate, Grbovic announced initiating a proper procedure against them. The Ministry of Internal Affairs also issued a statement saying that it was "surprised" by Grbovic's statements. It is said that the police "reacted as soon as they received information from the media", that they "secure ballot stations, not parties" and that "they could not separate Grbovic and members of the SNS".

More attacks on political actors on election day

Several attacks on political actors happened during election day on 3 April 2022. The “Let’s Not Drown Belgrade” Movement announced that the election controller in front of the “Moramo” Coalition was physically attacked in Zemun, Belgrade, after he discovered and filmed SNS activists who were using a parallel electoral roll to call people to vote. This Movement also stated that their candidate for the Belgrade City Assembly Milos Vuckovic was attacked after he approached several persons in front of a ballot station, for who he claimed were putting pressure on voters, using a parallel electoral roll and were telling voters on how to vote. Election observers from the “Youth Student Action – OSA” were physically attacked in Kac, during which their mobile phone was taken away and their movement was limited, after arriving on a location on which, as the observers stated, buying of votes was taking place. SNS activists also attacked the commissioners for the Moravica District of the Movement for the Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia, who filmed an event in a hotel which turned out to be a SNS event, after which he was physically attacked by the assistant to the Mayor of Cacak Milos Stevanic. There was another attack in this city when former SNS member of parliament Bratislav Jugovic was attacked in front of a ballot station, by a man who was identified and taken in by the police the same day. A day before, activists of the “Zavetnici” were attacked in Arandjelovac during a promotional material give-away, when two men approached them and slapped one of the activists. It was stated that the attackers were “well known as persons who resolve problems for the SNS” and that this was a case of “general intimidation with the aim to force them to retreat”.

Student and activists physically attacked in Novi Sad

Students and activists Mladen Cvijetic and Srdjan Djuric were physically attacked inside the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad on 13 April 2022, on student parliament election day. The students were attacked by the vice president of the faculty election commission Aleksandar Gajic and another man, after which the police arrived on the scene, informing the students that an adequate procedure will be started against the attacker. After the police left, Gajic repeated the attack trying to take away the student’s phones. The students stated that the incident was preceded by them trying to put a sticker on the ballot box with an inscription “Elections without elections”, protesting the fact that the faculty election commission annulled the election list of the “Student Reaction”, whose members are also Cvijetic and Djuric, because of which only one election list participated in the elections.