

# THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

*Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia 24 June - 7 July, 2022*



## Freedom of expression

*- Posters with the image of Veran Matic appeared in the city of Vranje*

Posters with the image of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists member Veran Matic and a series of derogatory comments directed at him appeared on the streets of Vranje on June 25, 2022. Matic was in Vranje the day before, when he visited "OK Radio" and the "No comment" cafe and condemned the attacks they were subjected to in the previous period, due to the fight against an illegal construction of a building next to their premises in this city. On this occasion, he stated that the pasting of the posters was "a confirmation of how safe the criminal clan in Vranje feels" as well as that "it had enough support in the institutions". This targeting was also condemned by the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Government of Serbia. The Ministry of the Interior announced on June 25, 2022 that two people, suspected of pasting the posters were detained, while a day later it was announced that another person was also detained related to the case.

## Official vehicle of the Radio-television of Vojvodina damaged

Local police in Ruma announced on June 27, 2022 that they had arrested a person suspected of damaging the official vehicle of Radio-Television of Vojvodina. According to media, first the license plates were removed from the RTV vehicle, and then the attacker carved the letter "U" on the vehicle itself (symbol of the neo-nazi World War 2 Ustasha movement), which at that moment was parked in front of the Croatian Cultural and Artistic Society in that city, where a concert was on-going.

*Activist who wrote about airport border police racial profiling case targeted by the Ministry of the Interior*

The Ministry of the Interior announced in a press release dated June 27, 2022, the initiation of misdeemeanor proceedings against Mirko Medenica, for insulting police officers, during events described in his article on the case of racial profiling at the "Nikola Tesla" Airport in Belgrade. In a text published earlier the same day, Medenica pointed to the behavior of two police officers at the border control, who spoke, as he stated, "inappropriately to two people of darker skin tone", and then "separated" them together with several other passengers "also with a darker skin tone", who stood in line for control. After a series of warnings to the officers about their behavior and the officer's statement that "he did not know who was coming, who they were and what they were doing in Serbia and how they endangered people", he too was taken to a special room with the threat of receiving misdemeanor charges. After a detailed search, the police inspector told him that he would receive misdemeanor charges for insulting an officer. The Ministry did not investigate the mentioned case, but stated in a press release that Medenica's allegations were "shameful and with the aim to damage the reputation of members of the Serbian police, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Republic of Serbia." As the reason for initiating the procedure, the Ministry cited Medenica's "raised voice" and calling "police officers who were on duty racist and other derogatory names" as well as "directing a series of insults against all members of the Ministry".

## *N1 TV crew disturbed while reporting at Linglong factory*

N1 TV announced on June 28, 2022 that their news team **was interrupted while reporting on a strike by Vietnamese workers at the Linglong factory in Zrenjanin**. After arriving at the building where the workers from Vietnam were housed, the N1 crew was approached by a private security guard who told them to "pack their camera", and after refusing to do so, the same worker said that they should not "film the building". After this, they were approached by a man, whom N1 assumed was one of the managers, who was filming the reporter and N1's official vehicle. Workers from Vietnam went on strike due to unpaid wages for work at the construction site of this company.

## *An actress of a play which is critical of the authorities was arrested in Kraljevo*

Milena Božić, actress of the play "Constitution and the Rights of Citizens", who speaks critically about the rule of law in Serbia, **was arrested in Kraljevo on June 30, 2022, for possessing one tablet of the "Bromazepam" prescription drug**. After the media conference held on the occasion of this play, the vehicle in which the actors and actress were located was intercepted on the street by members of the police, who then searched them. The circumstances and the legal justification for stopping and searching were left completely unclear, taking into account that the search procedure is an invasive one, which is carried out during discovery of facts about a committed criminal offense, with or without a court order in exceptional circumstances, while the inspection procedure, on the other hand, can be done at the discretion of the police, and a detailed inspection of belongings is not allowed except for "feeling clothes and shoes". In this case, the police conducted a detailed search of the actress's wallet, in which this medication, also characterized as an "intoxicating drug" was found, without adequate documentation supporting her claims that the medication was prescribed by her doctor. The actress was released from the police station after questioning, and according to media, she needs to submit evidence to the competent prosecutor's office showing that the drug was prescribed as therapy by a doctor. **Taking into account the aforementioned legal failures in the application of police authority, there is a well-founded suspicion that the police searched the actress with the intention of intimidation, taking into account her involvement in the play, which is critical in relation to the authorities.**

## *Threats to Danas, N1 and InfoVranjske journalists*

Velimir Bulatović, the father of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party MP from Vranjska Banja, Slaviša Bulatović, **insulted journalists of the Danas, N1 and InfoVranjske portals, through a post on Facebook dated June 23, 2022**. The insulting post followed after Dragana Cvetković from Vranjska Banja made public her suspicions about the forgery of the signature of her father Čedomir Cvetković, by the MP of the Serbian Progressive Party, Slaviša Bulatović, who after this action bought part of public property, on which he lives together with the Cvetković family and started the construction of a residential building. On that occasion, Dragana Cvetković held a press conference in front of the yard on which both families reside. Bulatović accused these three portals of "running a media campaign against him" and called them "auto-chauvinists" and "cattle". Danas stated that it tried, on two separate occasions, to get in touch with Slaviša Bulatović, but that they were unable to reach him by phone.

## *Pressure on environmental activists in the village of Dragovo*

**Environmental activists from the village of Dragovo, near Rekovac, Kragujevac, announced that they had received a lawsuit warning by a company that conducted geological research in that place**. In the warning sent by this company to several local residents, it was stated that due to roadblocks and the inability of the company to carry out the mentioned surveys, damages in the form of penalties arose due to breaching deadlines and the company's obligations regarding the performance of these research. Thus, the company calculated a compensation of 140,000 euros, and announced additional claims due to the drop in the value of its shares on the stock market. Miroљjub Popović, one of the activists, announced that the warning served to intimidate the locals and to stop the protest. Local residents in the municipality of Rekovac have been fighting for several months against the announcement of the mining of lithium and boron in this municipality, preventing exploration works and wells.

## Pressure on the president of the labor union "Sloga"

The United Labor Unions of Serbia "Sloga" announced on July 3, 2022, that the company "Valy d.o.o. Valjevo" filed a lawsuit against the president of this union, Željko Veselinović, demanding a prison sentence of one year. The lawsuit followed after Veselinović publicly spoke several times about the alleged illegal dismissal of excess employees in this company. Because of these public appearances, the company stated that Veselinović, with his public statements, "intended to damage the business reputation and creditworthiness of the company." "Sloga" stated that they consider the lawsuit "an open pressure on the union, workers, the state and the judiciary", as well as that they "will not give up the fight for workers' rights" and that "the lawsuit did not scare them". In October 2021, "Sloga" spoke about the unclear criteria on the basis of which 150 workers of the Valy company were declared technologically redundant, and later announced that one of the dismissed workers died of health problems, which the Valy company "didn't believe", "thinking she was acting, which is why she was exposed to discrimination, being transferred from plant to plant", and later she was "fired even though she had previously suffered health injuries while working in that company".

## Freedom of association - Death threats to "Kreni-promeni" campaign

The "Kreni-promeni" campaign announced on July 3, 2022, via Instagram, that it was receiving more and more threats directed both against the campaign itself and against Sava Manojlović, the director of this initiative. The announcement stated that the threats were inspired by negative and threatening statements made against them by top public officials, and some of these statements were compiled into a video that was included in this post. They stated that they will not be scared, citing one of the last threats that was sent via email, in which members of "Kreni-promeni" were death threatened.

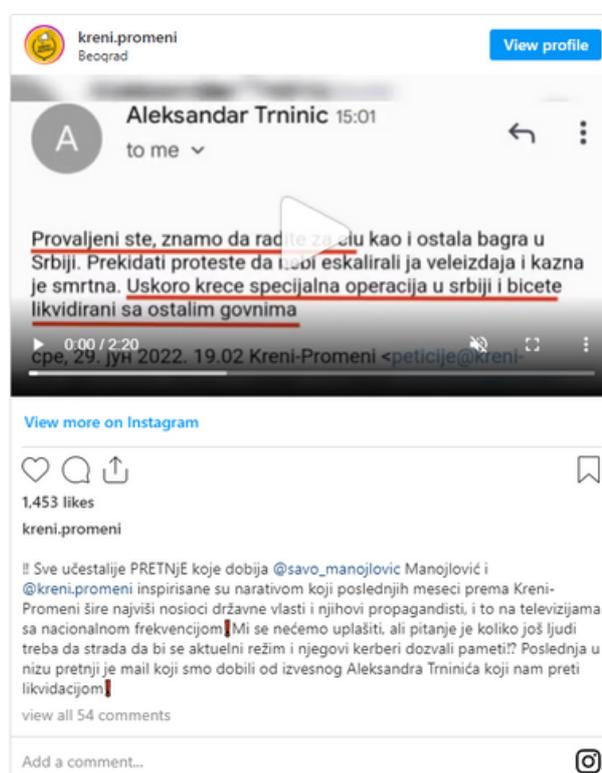


Photo: N1, Kreni-promeni

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# MONITORING

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## *Court case process of journalist Milan Jovanović delayed*

**The repeated trial in the case of burning of the house of "Žig info" journalist Milan Jovanović was postponed for the fifth time in a row, with the next hearing being scheduled in September due to the annual vacation of the defense attorneys.** The suspects of this attack, which took place in December 2018, were tried in two separate court cases, and after the convictions of the first-instance courts, these cases were sent back for a retrial after accepted appeals in the second-instance court: the first one in December 2021, in the case of Dragoljub Simonović, the former president of the City Municipality of Grocka and two other persons, and the same was done in the separate proceeding against Igor Novaković, on June 27, 2022. Due to the delay, the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia also spoke out, which "appealed to the Court to prevent any attempts to delay the proceedings in any way".

## *Journalists of the Bulgarian National Television gave statements to the competent prosecutor's office*

**The journalist crew of the Bulgarian National Television (BNT) made official statements to the competent prosecutor's office regarding the attack on them that took place near the "Podvirovi" mine in the municipality of Bosilegrad on June 14, 2022.** The team was attacked with stones while they were approaching this mine, by several persons, among whom were the workers in the mine, the security of the mine, but also the director of the company "Bosil metal" Miodrag Vukajlović. According to media, the attackers should be questioned in the following period, after which the prosecution will decide whether to press charges. BNT journalists, with the prior permission of the Ministry of Culture and Information, recorded a documentary show about environmental pollution in the vicinity of the aforementioned mine.

## *Verdicts in the case of environmental protests show systemic repression against activists*

**At a special media conference organized by Civic Initiatives, it was presented that over 60 acquittals, handed down in cases of misdemeanors allegedly committed by participants in environmental protests and roadblocks in several cities in Serbia at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, have proven** the abuse of norms by institutions for the purpose of repression against activists. It was stated that police officers filmed protests without authorization or recognized activists and recorded their presence, and this information was forwarded to the traffic police, who then issued fines for misdemeanors, for "staying on the roadway". In addition, these actions were performed according to the instructions of the managers - the police officers testified that they had the "task" to recognize participants, as well as to only "recognize" the participants, without identifying potential misdemeanors. One of the policemen "had the task of recognizing two faces on the video". It was concluded that the participants of these protests were under the pressure of rigged processes, and the police, based on the recordings and informal recognition of the rules, made files on everyone who was at the protest.