

THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia 8 - 21 July, 2022



Freedom of expression

- Higher Public Prosecutor's Office complaining of media for articles published

The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade announced on July 12, 2022 that it requested the Commissioner for the Protection of the Independence of Prosecutors to initiate proceedings against Nova.rs and N1 portals because of articles about the Deputy Public Prosecutor of the Special Crime Suppression Department Željka Nikolaidis. The statement said that the mentioned media "insinuated about the expertise and competence" of the deputy public prosecutor, as well as that the texts were "aimed at reducing the credibility of the acting deputy", because the State Council of Prosecutors is "exclusively competent to assess the expertise and competence of the holders of the public prosecutor's office". They characterized the writing of these media as "illegal influence", in order to create "media influence". N1 TV made an announcement on the occasion of this situation, saying that the relevant article "was prepared exclusively in the interest of the public", that "the deputy public prosecutor, as a holder of public office, is obliged to suffer a greater degree of criticism" and that "the media have the right but also the obligation to report to the public about persons for whom there is a justified interest of the public, which the acting deputy prosecutor certainly is". N1 stated that the reporting on failures in the work of the prosecutor's office is in the interest of the public, as well as that the findings presented in their text have been verified. Finally, TV N1 evaluated the prosecutor's announcement as "another pressure on the independence of media".

Portals N1 and Nova.rs wrote about prosecutor Nikolaidis and questioned her actions in one of the previous cases she worked on, which involved releasing persons with a criminal background despite existing evidence for prosecution.

A member of the Serbian Progressive Party, Lav Pajkić, insulted Danas, N1 and the Nova.rs portal

Member of the Serbian Progressive Party and former MP in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Lav Gligorije Pajkić, insulted the editors of the Danas, N1 and Nova.rs portals through his Instagram account. On that occasion, Pajkić shared the invitation of the Danas editorial office to young people for their school of journalism, publishing a picture from the film "Dara from Jasenovac" in which there are members of the Ustaša movement, and he tagged these media on them. All of this is accompanied by a description that "the views of Danas columnists on the issue of banning the President from visiting Jasenovac motivated him to describe to the students of their school what an average lecture would look like". The Independent Journalists's Association of Serbia (NUNS) condemned Pajkić's announcement, stating that this latest attack "is an example that shows that attacks, labeling and spreading hatred towards independent journalists come, first of all, from the ruling structures in the country."

■ DRUŠTVO |

Lav Pajkić "udario" na Danasovu školu
novinarstva: Uporedio Danas, N1 i Nova.rs sa
vodama logora u Jasenovcu

Screenshot: Danas

New targeting of journalists Snežana Čongradin and Milojko Pantić

Convicted war criminal and former president of the extreme right-wing Serbian Radical Party, Vojislav Šešelj, once again targeted the journalist of the newspaper "Danas" Snežana Čongradin and the journalist and editor of "Sportsko politika galaksija" Milojko Pantić. On this occasion, Šešelj published books with an offensive title, which contain comments on the texts of Čongradin and Pantić, who spoke about Šešelj's actions. Regarding this case, journalist Čongradin announced that she would not comment on Šešelj's latest targeting. We remind that journalist Čongradin is exposed to frequent attacks and threats because of her work and one of the last attacks happened at the end of April 2022, by an anonymous Instagram user, where the content of the message was reminiscent of the previous attack on Čongradin from the end of last year, by an official of the Football Association of Serbia. In April 2022, Čongradin referred to this last mentioned case of threats, when she stated that the process before the competent authorities is still ongoing and that she is exposed to retraumatization because she had to repeatedly make statements about how she felt about the attack.

A public official of the Serbian Progressive Party targeted journalist Nedim Sejdinović

Vladimir Đukanović, a former MP of the Serbian Progressive Party and a member of the High Council of the Judiciary, threatened and insulted journalist Nedim Sejdinović after the journalist's author's text was published in the weekly "Vreme". The editors of "Vreme" announced that Đukanović was "drawing a target" on this journalist "because he did not like his text". An urgent reaction of the competent authorities regarding this case was requested, and the Coalition for Media Freedom reacted as well, which condemned Đukanović's threats directed at Sejdinović, and among other things, the Coalition referred to the functions that Đukanović performed and is currently performing, and especially to the position of a member of the High Council of the Judiciary, a body that participates in the process of electing judges.

Threats to "Drvotehnika" magazine journalist Dragojlo Blagojević

The editor-in-chief of "Drvotehnika" Dragojlo Blagojević received death threats because of an article published in the July print edition of this magazine. According to media, the article talked about "forestry power mongers that resell wood at twice the price, and the state tolerating or encouraging all this for a long time". It was stated that Blagojević received a call late at night, when he was threatened with death. The journalist informed the police about this case, saying that he did not feel safe, and the police told him that they would contact him. It was also stated that in January 2020, Blagojević received threats from the general director of the Public Enterprise "Srbijašume" ("SerbiaForests") Igor Braunović, also because of an article published in this magazine, and Braunović later denied that he threatened Blagojević.

Freedom of assembly - Misdemeanor fines for Fiat workers who protested and blocked the road

Three workers of the Fiat company from Kragujevac received misdemeanor fines for the protest blockade of the Kragujevac - Kraljevo road from July 20, 2022, organized due to the uncertain fate of workers in the car factory after the company began the process of temporarily suspending production.

As the representative of the "Nezavisnost" labor union Igor Anđić told the media, during the protest he was not asked for his ID by members of the police, and he received information from an officer at the police station that the punishment was "ordered by the station commander". He also stated that he was not sure whether he will be punished for the blockade that was organized earlier in the town of Korićani, as well as for the one organized in Belgrade. Zoran Miljković, vice-president of the Independent Union of Fiat Plastics, also spoke to the media, who repeated that he was not asked for his ID at the protest either, and that he was not warned by the police that he was committing a misdemeanor, even though the misdemeanor order stated that such a warning was given. Considering that Saša Đorđević, the president of the Fiat Independent Trade Union, was also fined, Miljković stated that retaliatory measures were taken against the three of them, because there were more than a thousand workers at the protest, but only they received the fines. Miljković stated that he will not pay the fine, but will try to overturn them in court, because the police entered their ID card numbers on the misdemeanor warrant, which again, the police could not have known since they never even asked them for their IDs. We remind that the police, according to the same template, massively issued misdemeanor fines for blocking traffic to participants of environmental protests, which were held at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, while misdemeanor courts, as of July 4, 2022, passed more than 60 acquittals in those cases that were contested before the courts.

Private security attacked protest participants in Novi Sad

Members of private security, on several occasions, exceeded their law-proscribed authority and excessively used force against participants of a protest in Novi Sad on July 21, 2022. Upon arriving in front of the building of the Parliament of Vojvodina, where a session was held where the adoption of the new General Urban Plan of this city was in process, which was the reason for the protest, the activists were stopped by members of private security, who were behind metal fences. After the activists tried to pass through the gate and past the security guards towards the entrance to the building, a clash broke out, after which there were a number of incidents, which were marked by the excessive use of force by the security guards against the participants of the protest. In the videos that are available on media portals and social networks, it is possible to see how a member of the private security forces pushes one of the activists, who then falls to the ground due to the force of the push, while in another video it is possible to see the apprehension of one activist with excessive use of force. The most brutal videos showed the excessive use of force against one activist, who was held by a security guard with a knee on his neck, and the media compared this grip to the one used against George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020. The "Three Freedoms" Platform also reacted to these cases, and in the announcement, they demanded the suspension of repressive measures by the security forces and the initiation of proceedings against those who used excessive force against the participants of the protest.

Novosađanin kom su klečali na vratu najavljuje tužbu: Fizički se oporavljam, psihički će ići teže

Fotografija na kojoj je Novosađanin prikovan za zemlju, dok mu jedan od muškaraca kleči na vratu, obišla je Srbiju. Taj Novosađanin je Milorad Ljeskovac, magistar elektroinžinjerstva i otac troje dece.



Photo: Dragana Prica Kovačević, 021.rs

Freedom of association *-Woman in Black premises attacked*

The entrance to the premises of the Women in Black organization was attacked on July 12, 2022, a day after a series of activities that this organization conducted on the occasion of the anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica. As reported by this organization, an unknown person first introduced himself as a postman, and then poured red paint over the front door and staircase. This is the third attack on this organization since October 2021, with none of the cases receiving an epilogue before competent institutions. Women in Black stated that the attacks on them were encouraged by state officials who consider them "political dissidents", and that the "climate of impunity" maintained by the current regime further encourages such and similar attacks on them.

Warning before dismissal to Jura company employee who spoke out about working conditions

Dalibor Nikolić, a worker and union representative at the Jura factory in Niš, received a warning from his company after speaking about the working conditions at this factory. According to the media, Nikolić was informed in a written notification that he received at his home address that he had "violated work discipline" because he had given "incorrect information" about his employer. In question is information about malfunctioning air conditioners, which is why the temperature inside the factory was over 30 degrees, as well as information about the fact that emergency services had to intervene several times to help workers. Jura did not answer N1 TV about why Nikolić received the warning, but they replied that there were indeed problems with air conditioners and that they were fixed.

Stefan Mitrović, the union leader at the Post of Serbia, is under pressure from this company

The United Labor Unions of Serbia "Sloga" announced that the trade union representative in the Public Enterprise "Pošta Srbije" (Post of Serbia) Stefan Mitrović was facing pressure from his employer. It is stated that Mitrović was exposed to two external controls by the Zemun Working Unit, day after day, which "was not a practice or an usual procedure", suspecting that Mitrović is being set up for dismissal. It was also stated that the invitation to report as part of the extraordinary control did not specify a specific legal basis according to the Collective Agreement, nor a specific legal act of this company. Mitrović had already been punished with reduced wages, and he has appeared in public several times talking about the unfavorable working conditions in which the workers of this company work.