

# THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

*Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia 5 - 18 August, 2022*



## Freedom of expression

*- Verbal attacks by officials of the ruling party on the "Glas Šumadije" portal*

The Kragujevac City Committee of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) made a series of accusations against the "Glas Šumadije" news portal, after an article about the organized departure of SNS activists to a commemorative meeting on the occasion of the anniversary of Operation "Storm" was published. In this article, it was stated that the portal received information from "city companies, institutions and administration" that there was "terrible pressure" on employees to go to the anniversary event in Novi Sad. The article also mentioned short conversations that journalists had with people who gathered near the bus, from which it was concluded that they were going to the rally under pressure from the ruling party or out of sympathy for the leader of the party and the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. On the occasion of this text, the Serbian Progressive Party reacted, accusing the portal of working according to a "project assignment" with the aim of disparaging the gathering and because of "hatred towards the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić", and that it was "financed with dollars". Support for "Glas Šumadija" was expressed by numerous associations and opposition political parties, which called the SNS statement "anti-democratic", and that it reminded of the "war-mongering rhetoric of the Serbian Radical Party and that the ruling party cannot be expected to foster a culture of dialogue or anything that at least reminded us of European values".

## *Danas exposed to attacks after publishing an article on President Vučić*

The Danas portal was exposed to pressure from government officials and officials of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), after the publication of an article about the impossibility of state institutions to find the residence of the President of the Republic, Aleksandar Vučić. Danas first reported on a post of doctor Rade Panić, who stated that state institutions cannot find the President of Serbia in order to act on his criminal report against Vučić from 2020, and in Panić's post, one can see an exact address, which is stated to be the address where Vučić no longer lived. In the same article, Danas mentioned the Belgrade neighborhood of Belville as Vučić's place of residence, referring to the politician property database, but also to information about the place where Vučić voted in the last elections, and the location was definitely the Belville neighborhood. Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, then Interior Minister Aleksandar Vulin, and many other members of the Serbian Progressive Party, including tabloids close to the authorities, reacted to this text. Brnabić called Danas a "tycoon's pamphlet", calling on the competent institutions to react due to "violation of the Law on Data Protection", while Minister Vulin called Danas a "tabloid", which threatened the safety of the president and his family by publishing his address. The interlocutors of the Danas portal stated that the information about the president's residence, which was published by Panić and the Danas portal, was already public and that its publication was not subject to the provisions of the Law on Personal Data Protection, as well as that the statements of state officials were disproportionate, taking into account that any reaction was completely absent in those cases of publication of personal data, for which a violation of the law was undisputedly established.

## *New threats to the authors of the show Dobar, loš, zao*

The authors of the Dobar, loš, zao show, Nenad Kulačin and Marko Vidojković, received new threats via social networks. In Vidojković's column, which was published on the Danas portal, it was stated that they were sent a message containing derogatory comments about them, with a "threat" that the messages that Kulačin had previously exchanged with that person would be "sent to Vulin", the Minister of Internal Affairs. Kulačin and Vidojković are often the target of attacks because of their critical attitudes towards the authorities, which they express in their shows, while N1 reported on Vidojković's statement from April 12, 2022, in which he said that he had to leave Serbia due to death threats.

## *Freedom of assembly - Environmental activists on Šodroš worried about their safety*

A group of environmental activists, who have been camping in the green oasis Šodroš in Novi Sad for more than two months, told the media that they were worried because they saw members of the security forces and unknown cars near their location. As reported by N1, activists spotted members of the Gendarmerie in their vicinity, as well as unknown cars that they said were "suspicious", noting that during the entire time they were in Šodros, they did not spot anything similar, not a single member of the MUP in uniforms. N1 was told that they did not feel threatened, but that they were "not comfortable", recalling the recent incidents at the protest of activists against the adoption of the General Urban Plan on July 21, 2022, when members of private security used excessive force on protest participants. Environmental activists who are camping in this part of Novi Sad are trying to prevent the cutting of the forest at that location due to the construction of a new bridge with a bypass around this city, stating that they want to prevent the destruction of the "last green oasis" in this city.

## *Freedom of association - Mayor of Belgrade targeted Nataša Kandić and the Humanitarian Law Center*

At the session of the Assembly of the City of Belgrade, held on August 18, 2021, the Mayor of Belgrade, Aleksandar Šapić, targeted the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) and the founder of this organization, Nataša Kandić. After councilors of the "Moramo" coalition questioned the election of former military official Svetozar Andrić as a member of the City Council, against whom the HLC filed a criminal complaint for war crimes, Mayor Šapić, behind the speaker of the assembly, said that "everyone against whom Nataša Kandić and the HLC file a criminal complaint, that should be celebrated in the Serbian people". He also added that Kandić "accused the Serbian people of genocide" and that she "believed Serbs were absolutely guilty of everything in the wars of the 1990s". **The Humanitarian Law Center, as well as Nataša Kandić, are often targeted by right-wing public officials and politicians due to their decades-long involvement in the field of transitional justice and dealing with the past.**

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# MONITORING

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## *Criminal complaint filed by journalist Snežana Čongradin due to threats dismissed*

The competent prosecutor's office **dismissed the criminal complaint** filed by journalist Snežana Čongradin against Marko Čolić from the Football Association of Serbia, **due to the threats that Čolić sent to her in October 2021**. The Prosecution reasoned that "the mentioned messages, although they deviate from socially acceptable communication, do not contain an immediate, concrete and serious threat to the life of the victim or someone close to her". Lawyer Milena Vasić, who represented Čongradin in this case, filed an official objection to the prosecution's decision, stating that it "interpreted the threat in an extremely narrow way, not understanding its multimedia nature", as well as that "the threat does not have to be verbal, but that it can also be expressed with a gesture, which was the case here". Vasić further stated that the prosecution's move "sends the wrong message both to journalists and to those who would threaten them", i.e. that "if you find the appropriate form, you can threaten journalists with impunity". Čongradin spoke up herself, stating that "it was surprising that they reacted to the complaint at all", "bearing in mind the previous practice of institutions in relation to the intensity of threats that were made to journalists in public". After appearing on the show "Kvaka 23", produced by the FoNet news agency, in which she spoke about dealing with the past, Čolić sent a series of threatening messages to Snežana Čongradin, including an audio and video recording.