

THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia 19 August - 1 September, 2022



Freedom of expression

- Journalist Nenad Živković exposed to attacks

The Independent Journalist' Association of Serbia (NUNS) announced on August 23, 2022 that journalist Nenad Živković was verbally attacked by the "Banatska istina" portal. It was stated that in the disputed article on the aforementioned portal, Živković was characterized as a "traitor and foreign mercenary" and that he "hated the Serbian people". This was not the first time that "Banatska istina" wrote in this way about Živković, and NUNS saw this latest case as just a continuation of the campaign against independent journalists. NUNS condemned this attack and called on the institutions to protect Živković, as well as to find the authors of the disputed article who persistently target dissenters, endangering their safety.

New SLAPP lawsuit against Danas

Former State Secretary in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Dijana Hrkalović, who is on trial for influence peddling, sued the Danas portal for nine articles that were published on this portal in February and March 2022. Hrkalović stated that she suffered "mental pain due to the damaging of her honor and reputation" and demanded damages in the amount of one million dinars with interest. Danas stated that Hrkalović previously filed a total of 16 lawsuits against media, seeking compensation for damages due to texts published in them.

Pressure on members of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists

Ljiljana Stojanović, editor-in-chief of the JugPress portal, told Civic Initiatives that she was exposed to continuous pressure because of the support she gave to OK Radio from Vranje as a member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists. In a separate interview with Civic Initiatives, Stojanović stated that she received threatening messages during one visit to Vranje, in which it was stated that it was known exactly who she was seeing and what she was saying at the meetings she attended in the city. Stojanović concluded that the competent institutions did not sufficiently recognize the threats aimed at the members of the Permanent Working Group, including the case of pasting posters with the picture of Veran Matić, also a member of the Working Group, which contained threatening messages addressed to Matić. In the court proceedings regarding this case, all four persons suspected of pasting the posters were acquitted, while Matić called the Court's decision "scandalous".

Freedom of assembly - Environmental activists attacked by private security

Environmental activists, who are camping on mount Starica near Majdanpek, East Serbia, trying to prevent mining at this site, were attacked on August 20, 2022 by private security. As one of the activists, who happened to be in the camp during this incident, told N1, members of private security physically destroyed the activist camp, allowing the activists to take their personal belongings, and then ordered them to leave the location. Although they did not introduce themselves, they confirmed that they were hired by the Chinese company Zijin, which manages the mine in Majdanpek. Environmental activists set up a camp on a ridge of the Starica mountain in June 2022, in order to prevent further expansion of the mine.

Announcements about the cancellation of EuroPride 2020 in Belgrade

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 -Pressure on Novi Sad activists

On August 25, 2022, the Novi Sad communal police fined an activist who collected signatures against the construction of the controversial monument "Innocent victims of 1944/45" in Novi Sad. Mladen Cvijetić told N1 that, in accordance with the city's regulations, he submitted a request for occupying a public area so that he could set up a stand where signatures would be collected, but that even after 10 days, he had not received any response. He was fined not only for illegally setting up the stand, but also for refusing orders to remove it. On the occasion of this case, member of parliament in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Anna Oreg, spoke out, accusing the mayor of Novi Sad, Miloš Vučević, of suppressing the opposition and civil activism, reminding that "activists who collect signatures against monuments to proven war criminals and fascists are being fined". Oreg stated that two weeks earlier, activists sent a request to occupy public space, but that "in Novi Sad, it is a practice that political organizations never receive any response for a duly submitted request for civic activism." Several formal and informal groups, including local opposition parties, are protesting against the erection of the aforementioned monument, stating that the names of the victims include war criminals and fascists who participated in the Novi Sad Raid in 1942.