

THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia 2 - 18 September, 2022



Freedom of expression

- Ruling party MP targets critical media

Nebojša Bakarec, MP of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, targeted N1 and Nova S, through a post on social networks. Bakarec, who was also elected as the deputy chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Culture and Information, accused N1 TV of running a "hate campaign" against the President of the Republic, adding that these media were waging a "special war" and that they "instead of snipers for Vučić, decided to shoot with a shotgun". The Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia, stated that they saw this case as a continuation of labeling independent media as enemies of the state, as well as that "Bakarec has a problem with the understanding of democracy and freedom of opinion."

Private security restricting movement of activists in National Park

The "Koraci" Association announced on August 31, 2022, that activists Marko Oljača and Petar Holik were stopped by private security of the Galens company while they were moving through the Fruška Gora National Park. As stated in the announcement, the activists were first stopped by the security guards, with whom they then had an argument, and later they were also met by the police, who asked them for their IDs and warned them not to take pictures of private property.

Activists state that they were walking on a public road and a hiking trail within the National Park, near the "Neven" spring and the Kesten hill, which are already known due to the illegal fencing of the public road by the Galens company, which is building a large tourist complex at the end of the forest trail. Finally, this association reminded that the fencing of a national park is illegal, and in the case of private property, the passage of people and animals must be ensured.

Belgrade public transport drivers fired after speaking at a protest

Sima Sarik, a bus driver in the Belgrade City Transport Enterprise, stated for N1 on September 9, 2022, that he was fired after he spoke at a protest in front of the Presidency in downtown Belgrade, where the working conditions in this company were pointed out. In his statement to the media, he added that two of his colleagues were also fired because of speeches given at the protest. He stated that he was fired due to alleged speeding, failure to report arrivals to work and departures from work, but also because of what he said at the aforementioned protest.

Children left without a place in kindergarten due to the intervention of the trustee of the ruling party

Some children who stay in the kindergarten in the town of Pećinci were left without a place in this preschool institution, due, as the parents of these children claim, to the intervention of the local commissioner of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party. The parents claim that they were punished in this way because they were members of the opposition Democratic Party and because they participated in the recent farmers' protests. One of the mothers of the child who was put on the waiting list, Dragana Adamić, told the media that she could not enroll her child in kindergarten this year either because she was conditioned to vote for the ruling Serbian Progressive Party in the elections, which she refused to do. The parents also held a protest regarding this case, and they also tried to address the public at the press conference of the Democratic Party in the hall of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on September 6, 2022, but according to the statement of this party, their stay in the Assembly was limited by the decision of the President of the National Assembly Vladimir Orlić.

Freedom of assembly - *Activists attacked again on Mount Starica*

Environmental activists, who are staying on Mount Starica trying to prevent further mining by the company Zijin, were attacked again on September 9, 2022. As Nenad Miladinović, one of the attacked activists explained to N1, the workers from China hit him several times, and after the activist moved away, one of the managers of this company allegedly started to get in his face. He was soon surrounded by several people, who continued to hit him. Members of the local police stated that no one informed them that there was a physical conflict, and the company Zijin characterized the activists' behavior as "constant disruption of their employees", stating that the incident was "provoked by aggressive NGO activists". A few days later, a video surfaced again showing private security at the site, claiming to be hired by the Ministry of Mining and Energy. The Ministry later denied these allegations.

EuroPride Walk Banned

The Ministry of Internal Affairs announced on September 13, 2022 that a decision was made to ban the EuroPride walk. This decision was based on the assessment that there may be threats to the safety of people and property and the risk of violence. In addition to the EuroPride walk itself, the announced counter rally, which was announced by extreme right-wingers, was banned too. Numerous international and domestic actors reacted to the ban. The "Three Freedoms" Platform called this decision of the Stari Grad Police Station shameful and irresponsible, calling on the Ministry to cancel the ban after the organizers file an appeal against the decision. The statement said that the aforementioned security risks, which come exclusively from the organizers of the counter rally, cannot be a justification for banning a peaceful rally such as the EuroPride walk. The Belgrade Center for Human Rights reminded that it was worrisome that the Ministry, as the authority that should decide on the appeal, has already issued a statement taking a definitive position on the ban even before the organizers filed the appeal. An announcement was also made by the EU's Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Peter Stano, who stated that the EU was disappointed with the ban imposed by the Ministry. The appeal submitted by the organizers was rejected by the Ministry on September 14, 2022, and Goran Miletić from EuroPride announced the appeal to the Administrative Court. Despite the announced ban, the organizers of EuroPride 2022 have announced that the walk will take place, with a modified route that will be drastically shorter.

Freedom of association *- Zajedno Opposition Party Premises Attacked*

An unknown man tried to forcefully break into the premises of the Zajedno party in Novi Sad on September 4, 2022. As reported by this party for N1, and confirmed by video surveillance footage, an unknown person demolished the entrance to the premises of this party using an axe. It was stated that there were no people present in the office during the attack. After the incident, N1 unofficially confirmed that the suspect for the attack was detained by the police, where he was questioned about the case.



EUROPRIDE 2022

Overview of events that took place during EuroPride 2022, 17 September 2022

Attacks on journalists

Immediately before and during EuroPride 2022, journalists were exposed to intimidation and attacks by violent counter-gathering participants, including one case of mistreatment of a journalist by police officers. N1 journalist Petar Gajić was approached by an unknown man, a participant in the counter rally near the St. Sava Temple in Vračar, "warning" him to stay away, under the threat that "some things will be explained to him". Gajić's phone was taken away, which was soon returned to him. The attacker walked away after a journalist stood between him and Gajić. A FoNet news agency journalist was intimidated and insulted at the same location. Another journalist from the FoNet agency, Davor Lukač, was intimidated by the police near the Presidency building. Despite the journalist showing his credentials, two members of the police searched him. In response to Lukač's request that the police officers present themselves in accordance with the law, they refused, stating that they were not interested in the law. The N1 cameraman was hit with a water bottle by a former monk called Antonije, known for participating in similar gatherings in the past, who was detained by the police after the incident.

Attacks on EuroPride participants

Several participants were physically attacked on Saturday before and after EuroPride. Two women were physically attacked near the building of Radio Television of Serbia, when they tried to photograph participants of the counter rally, who were gathering at this location. Activists from Albania and Germany were attacked while returning from concerts that were held as part of the EuroPride program. According to the activists' testimony, police officers failed to react adequately even though they were at a distance from which it was possible to see and hear the event. Two activists were taken to the Emergency Center for check up. EuroPride organizers have confirmed that more than 5 people were attacked while returning to the hotel where they stayed.

Violent clashes between hooligans and the police

Members of hooligan groups clashed with police officers at several locations in the city during EuroPride. The biggest clashes took place near the St. Sava Temple, when hooligans used pyrotechnics and other incendiary devices against members of the police. As a result of these clashes, 13 policemen were injured, according to the statement of the Minister of Internal Affairs Aleksandar Vulin.

Uncertainty over EuroPride ban - further discouragement of citizens to peacefully assemble

On the day of EuroPride 2022, there was uncertainty as to whether the event would be held and in what format. In the morning hours of September 17, the Administrative Court announced that it had rejected the lawsuit of the EuroPride organizers, which they filed against the decision to ban the march within this gathering. The Interior Ministry later announced that no walk that had previously been banned would be held. However, the organizer of this event, Goran Miletić, later announced that the police allowed a new walking route, which was drastically shortened. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Aleksandar Vulin, called this new route "an escort of the participants" to the Tašmajdan Stadium, where concerts were planned as part of the EuroPride program. **Uncertainty caused by administrative procedures and statements of officials regarding the holding of this event, together with statements previously presented to the public by the highest state officials, the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister-designate, further discouraged citizens from enjoying the basic freedom of peaceful assembly.**