

# THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia 30 December - 19 January 2023



## Freedom of expression

### *- The President of Serbia targeted N1 journalists*

**The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, targeted N1 and its journalists, calling them "locators", during a presentation at a media conference on December 30, 2022.** Vučić criticized N1 journalists for reporting on military equipment stationed near Kosovo, during several weeks of tensions that were present in the north of Kosovo. At the press conference, he accused the journalists of N1 of being "locators", that is, of revealing the positions of the Serbian security forces. This term was used in the 1990s in a systemic campaign targeting journalists, that is, journalists were accused of being "locators" during the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. At the same conference, Vučić repeatedly insulted and targeted independent journalists, including N1 journalist Petar Gajić, who asked him questions at this conference.

### *Journalist from Pirot interrogated by the police after filming the scene of an environmental accident*

**Journalist Nenad Paunović was interrogated by the Pirot police on January 8, 2023, during an attempt to film together with another person the scene of an environmental accident in this city, when several ammonia tankers derailed at the end of 2022.**

Paunović stated that he tried to film the moment when one of the tanks was to be lifted by a crane, by asking another person, to use his drone for that purpose. However, a police officer removed them from the location stating that filming was not allowed, and then they were taken to the police station to give a statement. The lawyer of the journalist Paunović stated that the questioning at the police station was focused on personal documents, taking into account that Paunović showed the officers an identity card that he previously reported as lost, and which he later found, and the person with whom Paunović was filming with the drone did not have an ID card with him. The lawyer stated that there was very little talk about the recording itself, and they were not presented with the reason for which they were being taken to give a statement, adding that there must have been some notice about the prohibition of filming, as well as that numerous TV crews had already recorded reports in the same location before. Taking all this into account, the lawyer stated that the most likely reason for the officer's actions was the fact that Paunović reported on this accident for several days, during which he also discovered one of the victims of this accident, but also had an argument with the Minister of Environmental Protection, Irena Vujović, who arrived in Pirot after the accident.

### *Journalist Nenad Kulačin received threats*

**Journalist and columnist of Danas Nenad Kulačin received threats via Facebook, it was announced on January 12, 2023.** Kulačin stated that he received a threatening message that mentioned "dogs from Kosmaj", which refers to the case in which dogs attacked journalist Vladimir Radosavljević at the beginning of January on Mount Kosmaj and killed him on that occasion. Kulačin stated that he did not offend anyone with his writing and that he will not be scared.

## *Prime Minister Brnabić insulted critical media*

**The Prime Minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, sent a series of insults to the N1, Nova S and the newspaper Danas, while being a guest on the pro-government TV Pink on January 14, 2023.** On that occasion, she stated that these three media are "tycoon" and "paid" media, because of the way they reported on the departure of Danilo Vučić, the son of the President of the Republic and the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, Aleksandar Vučić, to Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to, among other things, attend the celebration of the unconstitutional Day of the Republic of Srpska in East Sarajevo. Brnabić stated that Vučić was not in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a member of the official delegation, but that he was accompanied by security because he was a protected person. She further stated that he had this status because of earlier writing by these media, which "made a target on his forehead", referring to the articles that link Vučić to notorious criminal clans operating in Serbia. Although she expressed that Vučić was in Bosnia and Herzegovina on his own initiative, N1 states that the prime minister never explained why he was among the dignitaries on the stage during the mentioned event.

## *The editor-in-chief of Niška inicijativa physically attacked*

**The editor-in-chief of Niška inicijativa, Srđan Nonić, was physically attacked in Niš while on duty, on January 14, 2023, by Nikola Panić, an employee of the City Administration.** After Nonić tried to record Panić visiting a betting shop in this city during working hours, Panić sent him a series of threats in an attempt to take away his phone. Nonić tried to escape from Panić, so he ran into the nearby police station to seek protection, but Panić caught up with him at the porter's office and attacked him. Nonić stated that it was unbelievable that he was attacked in the police building and that he was forced to run away from the attackers in the middle of the day. He added that this attack was "motivated by hatred" towards his work, particularly emphasizing his engagement in the field of checking and supervising the work of employees in the local administration.

## **Freedom of association** *-Masked neo-Nazis attacked a cafe in Novi Sad*

**The "Crni ovan" cafe in Novi Sad, known as a meeting place for anti-fascist groups and individuals, and where alternative events and fairs are organized, was attacked by a group of masked neo-Nazis on January 15, 2023, during which two people were injured. As stated by the owner of this bar, Bojan Šovljanski, the attackers armed with cold weapons wore clearly marked Nazi symbols, including the swastika, criticizing the competent prosecution, which qualified the attack as "violent behavior". Šovljanski states that the guests of this place feel scared, especially after learning about the existence of a Telegram group that gathers more than 600 neo-Nazis, and in which information is shared about this place and the people who come to it. Šovljanski was additionally exposed to threats after he was targeted by Goran Davidović, the former leader of the banned neo-Nazi organization "Nacionalni stroj", but also the leader of a similar organization "Leviathan" Pavle Bihali. The "Crni ovan" was attacked for the fourth time in just one year, Šovljanski points out that he is often intercepted by neo-Nazis on the street, and this attack was condemned by the mayor of Novi Sad and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. Despite the quick arrests of the attackers, Šovljanski emphasized that he does not expect the local authorities to take the necessary measures to provide them with protection.**

# MONITORING

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## *A new report on the state of human rights by Human Rights Watch*

The international non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch **has published a new world report**, thus presenting the latest findings for Serbia/Kosovo for the year 2022. The report states that journalists in Serbia, who reported critically on the actions of the authorities, continued to face intimidation, threats and violence, without an adequate response from the state. The report also looked at the events related to the EuroPride held in September 2022, which was held in an abbreviated format due to the ban of the competent authorities, and after which several attacks on the participants of this event were recorded.

## *Another case of dismissal of the misdemeanor charge from environmental protests*

Activists Rastko Stefanović and Ivan Živkov from the Građanski preokret association from Zrenjanin announced that they overturned the misdemeanor warrant **issued to them by the local police for participating in an environmental protest at the end of 2021, that is for blocking the road**. They were charged with a misdemeanor under the Law on Road Traffic Safety, which they disputed before the competent court, which found that the police illegally established their identities by photographing them at the protest, contrary to the Law on Police and Rulebook on the Method of Recording in a Public Place and the Method of Communicating the Intention of that Recording. We remind that Civic Initiatives have continuously monitored the process of mass issuance of misdemeanor warrants to participants of environmental protests at the end of 2021 who blocked main roads, and in July **it was announced that more than 60 such warrants were annulled** before the competent courts because police officers abused traffic regulations in order to prevent the freedom of assembly.