

# THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia 17 February - 9 March 2023



## Freedom of expression

### *Lawsuit against Nenad Živković and activist Ljiljana Spasić*

The Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) announced on February 24, 2023 that the former head of the Pančevo Police Department, Igor Arsić, filed a lawsuit against the editor-in-chief of the Pančevo Si Ti portal, Nenad Živković. In addition to Živković, Ljiljana Spasić, the executive director of Civic Action Pančevo, the founder of the aforementioned media, was also sued. It is stated that the reason for this lawsuit was a satirical text published on this portal earlier, in which Arsić was the main character. NDNV announced that this lawsuit was inadmissible and that it represents an attack on freedom of expression, and the fact that it comes from an official who should protect journalists, instead of putting pressure on them, is particularly worrying. Nenad Živković and Ljiljana Spasić are often exposed to pressure and threats because of their texts and because of their activities which are critical towards the authorities.

### *FoNet reporter attacked during a right-wing protest*

FoNet agency reporter Marko Dragoslavić was physically attacked while on duty on March 7, 2023. During the protest called "Students for Kosovo", Dragoslavić was physically attacked by being repeatedly hit in the head by an unknown person, who then quickly moved away from the scene. Dragoslavić stated that he was admitted to the Emergency Center, where his injuries were ascertained.

## Journalist Marko

### *Vidojković relocated due to threats*

Journalist and one of the authors of the show "Dobar, loš, zao" Marko Vidojković had to leave Serbia with his wife at the beginning of February, due to constant death threats to which he was exposed, the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia reported on March 6, 2023. For years, Vidojković has been receiving threats that have not been resolved, stating that only one case ended with an agreed guilty plea of the accused, and in the other case the accused received the minimum sentence prescribed by the legislation. The International Association of Poets, Essayists and Writers (PEN) recommended the immediate relocation of Vidojković from Serbia, requesting the Serbian authorities to urgently investigate all cases of threats to which Vidojković was exposed. His colleague Marko Kulačin, who also experienced threats and insults, announced on March 7, 2023 that the two refused police protection while Aleksandar Vulin was the Minister of Internal Affairs, stating that they decided on such a move because they do not trust the institutions. On this occasion, he stated that only a day before, Vulin had targeted both him and Vidojković on TV Pink, which is close to the ruling Serbian Progressive Party. Kulačin stated that the threats started in 2019 and that they are a type of organized campaigns, taking into account that tabloids close to the ruling party often published similar articles targeting them.

## *Independent media once again targeted by Prime Minister Brnabić*

**The Prime Minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, once again targeted a number of media that report critically on the work of the government, on two occasions, on March 4 and 7, 2023.** Originally, as a guest in the morning program of TV Pink, she spoke about "tycoon media", referring to TV N1, Nova S, but also the newspaper and portal Danas. In the last case, she "thanked" these media because they construct a "personality cult of Aleksandar Vučić", due to a series of texts that were published about Vučić during his stay in Qatar at the UN Conference of Least Developed Countries. We remind that just one month earlier, Brnabić made a series of accusations against investigative journalists, especially journalists from the Crime and Corruption Investigation Network (KRIK), due to the articles published on this portal, which concern the connections between criminal groups and the ruling party.

## *Multiple cases of pressure on N1 journalist Milan Nikić*

**TV N1 correspondent from Kragujevac, Milan Nikić, was repeatedly exposed to pressure due to his work.** Initially, on March 3, 2023, he was verbally attacked while reporting on the protest of Kragujevac Vodovod employees, when an unknown person called on at him, and then approached him and asked to speak to him privately. That person withdrew after Nikić turned on the camera with the intention of filming him. On that occasion, Nikić asked several workers in protest to escort him to his car and stated that he felt disturbed. Just a day later, he noticed a car with its lights off parked in the immediate vicinity of the apartment where he lives, stating that he noticed one person sitting in it. He stated that he got out with the camera on in an attempt to record the event, only for the driver to start the car and leave shortly after. In the end, he stated that this was the seventh time he experienced threats and harassment because of his work, as well as that he believed in the justice system and that he would continue to report such situations, adding that one previous case of attack ended with a several-month prison sentence for the person who attacked him at a protest earlier.

# MONITORING

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## *Prosecutors who investigated corruption in a state-owned enterprise removed from post*

**After the order for the arrest of several persons accused of embezzlement in the state-owned power company (EPS), the prosecutor who led the case, Bojana Savović, has been removed from her post and transferred to another department, N1 reported on February 23, 2022.** N1 soon conveyed the news that Jasmina Paunović, another prosecutor who worked on this case, had also been dismissed. On the same day, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office addressed the public with a statement in which it was stated that prosecutor Savović was transferred according to the regular annual plan, and according to her previously expressed wish, as well as that she was delaying the proceedings in the case. Savović later denied the allegations from this statement, saying that she never asked to be transferred to another department, nor did she delay the case. While there are ongoing protests and petitions in support of the dismissed prosecutors, including the initiation of a series of proceedings against senior public prosecutor Nebojša Stefanović, who is behind the decisions on the dismissal, at this moment there is still no adequate reaction from the competent institutions with the aim of protecting the prosecutors. The European Commission also commented on this case, stating that it is monitoring the development of the situation and that it expects Serbia to implement the obligations arising from the constitutional changes in the field of justice.

## *Serbia fell on the freedom index in the latest Freedom House report*

**In the latest report of the international non-governmental organization Freedom House, Serbia fell on the freedom index in the world, from 62 to 60 points.** The report particularly criticizes the repressive steps taken with the aim of suppressing protests - firstly, by masked persons allegedly connected to the authorities, and then by administrative procedures by banning the holding of the EuroPride 2022 event in Belgrade in September 2022. In the area of freedom of expression, the report referred to pressures on journalists in the form of lawsuits and criminal charges, lack of transparency of media ownership, editorial pressure from politicians and politically connected media owners, direct pressure and threats to journalists and a high level of self-censorship. The World Freedom Report is an annual report on political rights and civil liberties, and this year's edition covers 195 countries and 15 territories.



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