

THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia, 24 March - 6 April 2023



Freedom of expression

The mayor of Belgrade sued BIRN, seeking compensation of 12 million dinars

The mayor of Belgrade, Aleksandar Šapić, filed two lawsuits against the Balkan Investigative Research Network (BIRN) for the articles they wrote about his real estate - about the villa in Trieste and the legalization of the building on Bežanijska Kosa, it was announced on March 29, 2023. Šapić demands that BIRN pay him a total of 12 million dinars for mental pain. BIRN stated that this is a SLAPP lawsuit aimed at intimidating and discouraging journalists from writing about certain people or topics of public interest. The legality of the upgrade of Šapić's building on Bežanijska Kosa has aroused the interest of many independent media, given that it is largely different from the urban planning solutions of other buildings in that neighborhood. In addition, the statements of neighbors who claim that the works on the building were illegal and that they endangered the surrounding buildings were also released.

Danas journalists threatened

The official TikTok account of the newspaper Danas has received several death threats after a video published on March 29, 2023, in which journalist Nina Čolić talked about the seizure of a car owned by Uroš Panić, the son of the controversial Petar Panić Pana and godfather of Aleksandar Vučić.

"You're playing with life," "You won't be long," "Bullet," "You won't be talking for long," "Erase until darkness eats you," "Expect a sniper," are just some of the over 400 messages below the video, and a large number of them can be interpreted as threats. The threats were reported to the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.

Actor Marko Janketić received death threats for his statement about life in Serbia

Because of the statements about life in Serbia that he made on the show "PopTok" on March 30, 2023, actor Marko Janketić received many insulting messages and death threats. Namely, he spoke in the show about the non-functioning of the country's institutions and how he would advise his children to leave the country. This caused the anger of a large number of people who spared no words to insult him and threaten him in various ways. The actor was publicly supported by many colleagues and other public figures, appealing that this is a country where one can publicly express an opinion, even if not everyone likes it and disagrees with it.

Aleksandar Vučić publicly criticized N1 journalist at a press conference

The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, during his address to the media in Novi Pazar on March 30, 2023, in which he stated that there are no deadlines and restrictions for the re-registration of Kosovo's KM plates at the RKS, publicly criticized the journalist of television N1 who asked him whether the KM plates remain, looking back to his earlier statements. Instead of answers, he asked counter-questions, making accusations against the journalist, as well as the entire N1 television. President Vučić as well as other senior political actors often use press conferences and TV appearances to harass and make accusations against journalists who critically assess the actions of authorities, thus further encouraging attacks to which journalists in Serbia are exposed every day.

Journalists leaving press conference because of insults

From the press conference organized by the editor and owner of the tabloid "Informer" Dragan J. Vučićević on March 30, 2023, journalists of N1 and Danas decided to leave after a series of insults at their expense, both from Informer journalists and others who came to support Vučićević. One of the questions that Vučićević responded to was the question of why he persistently claims that he was sentenced to prison, and not to a fine, which he refuses to pay. Namely, Vučićević was sentenced for insulting journalist Jugoslav Ćosić and fined 200,000 dinars, which he refuses to pay.

Pink TV aired a spot calling for the arrest of journalists from Nova, N1 and Danas

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Freedom of assembly

Activists from Sodroš detained after a clash with the police

During the felling of trees on Šodros on March 24, 2023, there was a conflict between activists preventing the felling and the police, after which several activists were detained. Two activists tried to break through the police cordon, after which one was punched and the other knocked to the ground. After cutting the trees, the activists tried to prevent the approach of the truck that came to pick up the cut trees, which is why six of them were arrested, released on the same day, but several misdemeanors and one criminal complaint were filed against them. Activists are fighting against the construction of a new bridge on a branch of the Danube, in an oasis of protected animal and plant species that the people of Novi Sad use for recreation and fishing.

Freedom of association

Crni ovan again the target of vandals

The bar in Novi Sad, which is known for hosting activist seminars, humanitarian actions, and alternative fairs, was once again the target of vandals, as on March 25 the banners that stood there were torn.

This bar was vandalized once again at the beginning of the year, when masked attackers injured two people.

MONITORING

The State Department's annual report on the state of human rights - Serbia is still in an enviable place

Judiciary, violation of freedom of expression, corruption in the government, gender violence and violence against LGBTQ persons are only some of the problems that Serbia fails to solve, shows the annual report on the state of human rights for 2022 of the US State Department, the results of which have been released on March 24, 2023.

The Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia registered 132 attacks on journalists, of which nine were physical. The report also mentions the problems faced by non-governmental organizations, as well as individual activists, such as Aida Ćorović. The report states, among other things, that human rights violations in Serbia are reflected in reports of humiliating behavior in police stations, poor conditions in prisons, serious problems in the independence of the judiciary, serious violations of freedom of expression and the media, including violence, threats of violence, unjustified arrests and investigations against journalists.



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