

THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia, August 11 - August 24, 2023



Freedom of Expression

Hacker attack on Demostat portal

The Demostat portal was out of service for several days due to a **hacker attack**. According to Demostat, this is the first time that they have informed the public on this matter, but that this is not the first time that their portal has been attacked by hackers.

Prohibited screening of Albanian movie

The High Court in Vranje **prohibited the screening of the Albanian movie "Nevernik"** by Gani Veseli from Preševo. The official statement of the court has not been published, but Veseli's lawyer says that the verdict states that the movie allegedly spreads **hatred, discrimination, and violence**. Screening of another film by the same author will be allowed if the "Republic of Kosovo" logo is removed from the credits, which the author doesn't want to do because, as he explained, both movies were financially supported by the Kosovo government through National Council of Albanians in Serbia.

KRIK convicted on Koluvija's lawsuit

According to the first-instance verdict of The High Court in Belgrade, **the research portal KRIK was convicted in the proceedings following the lawsuit by Predrag Koluvija**. Judge Bojana Čogurić concluded that Krik violated the presumption of innocence with its text "Scheduled start of the trial for Jovanjica 2" because Koluvija was labeled as an "accused drug lord" in the text. KRIK editor Stevan Dojčinović notes that the use of such expressions is a regular practice in well-known world media when writing about accused leaders of drug cartels and that it is not desirable to burden the text with complex and difficult-to-understand legal formulations. For years, KRIK has been subjected to numerous SLAPP lawsuits aimed at silencing critical media.

Two false bomb reports on RTV

On August 16 and 18, **RTV buildings were evacuated due to reports of bombs**. The team of the Ministry of Internal Affairs went to the field both times and searched two RTV buildings, during which it was determined that the reports were false. On August 10, employees of RTV were forced to temporarily leave their workplaces due to another false bomb report.

Singer Jelena Karleuša filed criminal charges against N1, Nova S, and Danas

Singer Jelena Karleuša filed criminal charges against the editors and journalists of N1, Nova S, and Danas for, as she states, "publishing lies and untrue information". This lawsuit comes right after the media that Karleuša sued published information about the huge amount of money that the state-owned Telekom Srbija allocated for the singer's projects. Citizens of Serbia have a right to be informed about the way state enterprises, such as Telekom, spend their money. Interestingly, the partnership between Telekom and the singer comes after the singer has on several occasions publicly supported the policies of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party.

The mayor canceled the Silafest

The international film festival Silafest, which takes place in Veliko Gradište, was canceled without any explanation by the decision of the mayor of that municipality, Dragan Milić. The organizers believe that the real reason for the cancellation of the festival is that the owner of the "Alternativa" Agency, which is the executive producer of the festival, is a journalist, writer, and movie director Boško Savković. At the beginning of June, Savković was arrested, because of slogans he carried at the "Serbia against violence" protest, and he was sentenced to 6 months of probation for "calling for the violent overthrow of the constitutional order".

President Vučić insulted Nova journalists

At the press conference, Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić repeatedly called Nova journalists "liars". Vučić, commenting on Nova's writings related to the content of the document signed at the meeting in Athens, called Nova's journalists "liars" on several occasions, thus the president continues the practice of targeting, insulting and humiliating journalists of independent media who are regularly exposed to this unacceptable practice on press conferences of the president of the state.

Freedom of Assembly

Less pay or dismissal for participating in a protest

Zoran Gajić, a post office worker from Sremska Mitrovica, received a message from his superiors informing him that he would be transferred to a lower job position or, in case he refused, he would be fired. The reason for such decision wasn't stated, but he was told that "he knows well the reason for it". Gajić believes that the real reason for the sudden change in his work engagement is his active participation in protests against violence, which have been held throughout Serbia every week since May. Gajić, who is also a single father, has health problems, which is why he cannot perform the work that his superiors, in a controversial way, determined for him, and he will seek an assessment of the legality of the new employment contract before the court. Pressures and blackmail are another way in which power holders in the state and society try to dissuade citizens from actively participating in protests and participation in political life, which is a right that belongs to everyone without distinction.

Freedom of Association

Graffiti targeting Sofija Todorović

In the neighborhood of Borča, where the program director of Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) Sofija Todorović lives, graffiti surfaced with a misogynist message targeting the activist. The letter "Z", which symbolizes Russian aggression on Ukraine, was written on the wall as well. YIHR says that the goal of such actions is to silence human rights activists and that the women active in political life are particularly exposed to attacks. The very fact that graffiti appeared in the neighborhood where Sofija lives is an open message from the perpetrators that activists cannot feel safe even in their own communities. In addition to numerous civil society organizations, the graffiti was also condemned by the Embassy of Ukraine and the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, who called on the competent institutions to react and sanction the perpetrators. Human rights activists in Serbia are frequent targets of attacks by far-right groups, therefore it is very important that the state shows determination in punishing all forms of violence against human rights activists, and thereby ensure conditions for their undisturbed life and work.

Đukanović targets NGOs

Vladimir Đukanović, a member of the National Parliament and high-ranking Serbian Progressive Party official, called on the state via his account on X platform (formerly Twitter), to pass a law that will "regulate the work of the NGO sector" and thus "prevent them from receiving money for their activities from abroad". A few days later, reacting to the ban on entry into Serbia of the former minister of the Government of Montenegro, Jovana Mirović, Đukanović stated that everyone who finances "non-governmental organizations that create chaos should be banned from entering". With his statements, Đukanović continues to spread a negative narrative about non-governmental organizations and thereby stimulates citizens' mistrust towards the civil sector and creates a dangerous atmosphere for all those who are part of civil society.

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MONITORING

The report "Press Freedom Status for Women Journalists" was published

The Coalition for Women in Journalism published the July report on "Press Freedom Status for Women Journalists". The report registers different types of pressures and attacks to which female journalists around the world have been exposed. The month of July was characterized as "the most dangerous month" for female and LGBTQ journalists in 2023. The report also mentions several situations in Serbia when female journalists were the targets of attacks and pressure. An example of video-clip that Vladan Sekulić, a member of the ruling party, shared on his Instagram account, in which female journalists of N1, Nova, and Danas were targeted as well, including Žaklina Tatalović, and Vanja Đurić, was mentioned. Also mentioned was the case when a group of journalists, including Žana Bulajić, were locked up and prevented from asking questions of government officials at the EU-related event. Therefore, the report stated that the situation with media freedom in Serbia has worsened.

REM on the use of Artificial Intelligence

The Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media announced a statement on the use of artificial intelligence in media. They stated that during the whole duration of the TV program, that has been generated through AI, it should be clearly indicated. The announcement comes after the pro-regime TV channel Pink aired content in which the statements of opposition politicians such as Dragan Đilas, Marinika Tepić, Vuk Jeremic, and Boris Tadić were generated with the use of artificial intelligence.

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MONITORING

Serbia ranks 10th in Europe in terms of the number of SLAPP lawsuits

The CASE coalition, which keeps track of SLAPP lawsuits across Europe, has released an updated report with data collected over the past year. On the list of 35 European countries, Serbia took 10th place with 28 registered lawsuits. As the coalition only publishes data on cases it has been able to verify, the actual number of lawsuits is potentially higher. In recent years, SLAPP lawsuits have become a practice used to stifle critical thought, and the most common targets of these lawsuits are journalists, media, activists, and NGOs.



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