

THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Cases of violations of basic human rights in Serbia, September 8 - September 21, 2023



Freedom of Expression

Pressure on N1 journalist Ana Novaković

N1 journalist Ana Novaković found herself as a target of attacks by Vladimir Đukanović, Dijana Hrkaločić, and Informer TV after reporting from the hearing in the "Jovanjica" case and from the hearing in the proceedings against the KRIK portal redaction. Through his account on platform X, Đukanović accused the journalist of "issuing directives" to the gathered citizens at the hearing in the "Jovanjica" case, although the video that Đukanović shared, clearly shows that the journalist was communicating with the cameraman, which is an integral part of the journalist's job. On the other hand, Dijana Hrkaločić asked for the postponement of the hearing in the proceedings she had taken against the redaction of portal KRIK because she didn't want Ana Novaković to attend the hearing. Hrkaločić accused the journalist of "lynching certain people". Targeting endangers the safety of the journalist, and hinders her further professional work, so the question of who is actually being lynched is posed.

Prime Minister targets the media again

The Prime Minister of Serbia, Ana Brnabić, once again **targeted independent media**, which she labeled as "tycoon media". On her account on the X platform, she counted "negative texts" written about President Aleksandar Vučić that were published on the portals Danas, Direktno, N1, and Nova.

Freedom of Assembly

A fight at the environmental rally

During the blockade of Sava's Embankment, there was a physical confrontation between a protest participant and a traffic participant, and on that occasion, the activist suffered minor head injuries. Members of the informal association "Savski nasip" (Sava's Embankment) organized a roadblock because traffic is prohibited in this area, but the owners of illegally built houses don't follow this rule. During a blockade, a woman drove her car at the gathered citizens and activists, and on that occasion, she argued with one of the protest participants, which eventually resulted in a fight. Considering the frequency of attacks on activists, there is growing concern for their unhindered activities and safety.

Freedom of Association

Environmental activist attacked

Miloš Kuvekalović, an environmental activist from "Čuvari Kablara" (Guards of Kablar), was physically attacked by a construction worker.

Activists and citizens oppose the construction of a glass observation deck on top of the Kablar mountain near Čačak, and try to block further work, but private security prevents them from doing so. Kuvekalović was attacked by the construction worker, who took his phone and knocked him to the ground. But as Kuvekalović explained, the worker subsequently apologized to him and said that he "had to do that". In recent years, environmental activists in Serbia have been very often exposed to physical attacks and intimidation, with the goal of stifling their activism.

An activist of the Lokalni front injured

An activist from the "Lokalni front" (Local front) Predrag Voštinić was attacked on Sunday evening in Kraljevo. He was knocked off his bicycle by the driver of a car with a Novi Sad license plate, and on that occasion, Voštinić suffered arm and head injuries.

After the attackers failed to push him off the road on the first try, they turned around at the roundabout and returned to reach and hit the activist. The attacker was detained, and the "Lokalni front" believes that this attack wasn't accidental. Of particular concern is the information that the students of Police Academy were among the attackers. Several opposing political parties stated that this was an attempted murder and they called for competent authorities to react adequately and punish the perpetrators.

Activists of the Society for the Protection and Study of Birds of Serbia received death threats

After the discovery of poaching of the quails in the Toplički district, activists of the Society for Protection and Study of Birds of Serbia received death threats via social media. The association called on the authorities to react because a large number of people are calling for the killing and injuring of activists. Threats usually come from hunters, which is an additional reason to be alarmed and take threats seriously.

MONITORING

Postponed trial for targeting a journalist and citizens in Šabac

In Šabac, the trial of the defendant Milan Filipović for spreading posters targeting a journalist and citizens was postponed, because the defendant didn't show up in court. Filipović is charged with the criminal offense of jeopardizing safety because he posted warrants around Šabac on which are photographs of the editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Podrinske" Isidora Kovačević and two citizens of Šabac Aleksandar Mijailović and Veljko Anđelić. Two years have passed since this case when warrants with photos of journalist and citizens appeared all over Šabac after the protest against the Rio Tinto company. Since then, Isidora Kovačević has been living in fear and uncertainty and she states that she has been begging authorities to do their work for two years, but that it is "obviously impossible" in Serbia.

The detention of journalist Milovan Brkić was terminated

According to the decision of the Appellate Court in Belgrade, the detention of journalist Milovan Brkić was terminated, but he was ordered not to leave his apartment. As a reminder, in July Brkić was sentenced to 14 months for committing the crime of calling for a violent change in constitutional order at one of the "Serbia against violence" protests. During his stay in prison, Brkić went on a hunger strike, and his otherwise poor state of health was further impaired. Although the texts in the magazine "Tabloid" owned by Milovan Brkić are often problematic from the point of view of journalistic standards, the treatment and measures applied to Brkić are worrisome and pose a danger to all journalists who in the future may become victims of torture by the justice system.



MONITORING

The Co-owner of "Galens" lost the lawsuit

The Appellation Court in Novi Sad dismissed a lawsuit filed by Sanja Petrić, the co-owner of "Galens" and "Promist", in which she demanded that activist Dragana Arsić pay her 800,000 dinars. Petrić sued Dragana Arsić for damage to her reputation and suffering because of the protest against the fencing of part of the "Fruška Gora" National Park. Dragana Arsić is an activist of the association "Defend the Forests of Fruška Gora" and owners of "Galens", Nebojša and Sanja Petrić, filed 5 SLAPP lawsuits against her and two environmental organizations. Environmental associations are protesting and pointing to the allegedly corrupted investments of these companies in the protected area of Fruška Gora. SLAPP lawsuits are targeting the activists in order to deter them from public participation.

