



Three Freedoms Under the Magnifying Glass Violations of Basic Human Rights in Serbia

October 20 - November 2, 2023

Freedom of Expression

Bakarec insulted television stations N1 and Nova S

Already at the first meeting of the fall session of the National Assembly, a member of the parliament from the Serbian Progressive Party Nebojša Bakarec used the opportunity to insult television stations N1 and Nova S, calling them "Šolak's media", "pirate's media", and "privileged by Luxembourg". Bakarec, who is also the chairman of the Committee for Culture and Media, labeled the aforementioned media by commenting on the proposals of two laws on media which he considers to be "great" and "pro-European" despite the numerous objections pointed out by journalists and media associations. As the elections are announced for December, it is expected that attacks and targeting of critical media will intensify in the upcoming period. In addition to Bakarec, Interior Minister Bratislav Gašić also used the opportunity to deal with the critical media, which he said "don't pay a single dinar in taxes to Serbia."

Access to the trial was denied to journalists

Despite the fact that they had credentials, Veran Matić, a member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, and a TV Insider journalist were denied access to the main hearing at the trial of the controversial businessman from Vranje, Dejan Nikolić Kantar. The guard said that the reason he could not let them in was because of the crowd in the courtroom. Matić told the media that the courtroom was filled with Nikolić's friends. We remind you that on August 9, the High Court in Vranje confirmed the first-instance verdict against Dejan Nikolić Kantar, who was sentenced to a year and a half in prison for endangering the safety of OK Radio owner Olivera Vladković and financial director Svetlana Ivanova. During the trial, Kantar tried to obstruct the work of the court in various ways and delay the passing of the verdict.

Nenad Kulačin is again the target of threats

Nenad Kulačin, the author of the "Good, Bad, Evil" podcast, was once again the target of threats via social media, the organization SafeJournalists announced. This year alone, Kulačin reported 8 threats to the prosecutor's office, and to date only one decision has been made to dismiss the criminal complaint, while the other cases are still in the prosecutor's office. We remind you that the second author of this show, Marko Vidojković, was relocated from the country in March of this year due to the severity and frequency of the threats he was exposed to. This is another in a series of a large number of threats addressed to journalists in Serbia, where 56 cases of threats and attacks against journalists have been registered since the beginning of this year, according to the report of the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM).

Vladimir Đukanović sued journalist Vuk Cvijić

Member of the Serbian Progressive Party Vladimir Đukanović sued NIN journalist Vuk Cvijić for mental pain and demanded compensation of 1.1 million dinars. Đukanović sued the journalist for publishing an official note from the trial in which police inspector Slobodan Milenković, who discovered Jovanjica, states that Đukanović and businessman Aleksandar Papić, through an intermediary, offered him a bribe of one hundred thousand euros to cover up the whole case. Rodoljub Šabić, a lawyer and former Commissioner for Information of Public Importance, stated that this is an attempt to "intimidate all journalists who have the courage to write about crime, corruption, abuses and connections of members of the political elite with organized crime". This is another in a series of SLAPP lawsuits aimed at preventing critical and professional reporting of journalists.

Hotel owned by Minister fined for banning debate on freedom of speech

The "New City" hotel in Niš, owned by the Minister without portfolio Novica Tončev, was fined by the decision of the Commercial Court because it canceled the debate on freedom of speech in 2019. The debate was organized by the Institute for European Affairs, and after four and a half years, the court ruled that the hotel's decision to cancel the conference hall was made for political reasons. Cancellation of conference halls right before scheduled events or the inability to rent them at all is a problem that CSOs and representatives of opposition political parties often face, which is a direct attempt to stifle critical thought and freedom of expression. Although the court's ruling is significant, the time frame in which the ruling was made is not encouraging. The Institute announced that incidents like this case "violate democratic processes and limit access to public spaces for dialogue".

Freedom of Association

The activist was kicked out of the event organized by the municipality

Activist and pensioner Branislava Tatić was thrown out of the local cinema where the October Awards ceremony of Bačka Palanka municipality was organized. Although the event was open to the public, the security forcibly threw the activist out of the building, where the police waited. It is not clear why the security guards violently kicked the pensioner Branislava Tatić, but one of the reasons may be that the activist was wearing a T-shirt with the words "Resignation" which is a message to the authorities of Bačka Palanka. The citizens of Bačka Palanka have been sending this message to the authorities of the city municipality since the tragic events in July when a grandfather and his grandson were killed by electric cables after storms. Branislava Tatić suffered injuries in the area of the forearms due to the unjustified and violent approach of the security guards.

Activist attacked

Environmental activist and one of the organizers of the protest against violence in Čačak, Jevdenije Julijan Dimitrijević, was attacked after the protest in the city center. Two masked young men attacked the activist and "gave him greetings from lawyer Ivan Čvrkić". The lawyer denied having any role in the attack. Competent authorities must prosecute the attackers, in order to send a clear message that violence is unacceptable and that terror and pressure on activists must stop.

Death threat to Aida Ćorović

Graffiti calling for the murder of activist Aida Ćorović appeared in Vrbas. In addition to the sentence "Kill Aida Ćorović when you see her", graffiti with the image of Ratko Mladić was painted. Ćorović was recently convicted of violating public order and peace, because she threw eggs at a mural of Ratko Mladić in November 2021. In this way, the institutions of the system took the side of extreme right-wingers who glorify war criminals and spread hatred and intolerance in society, while the human rights activist was once again put in a situation of danger.

Tabloid campaign against BCSP

Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP), director Igor Bandović, and deputy director of this organization Bojan Elek, were the target of an organized tabloid campaign. First, the tabloid "Alo" published the article "A fight almost broke out! Bojan Elek accused Igor Bandović of stealing 300,000 euros from sponsors", and then other pro-regime tabloids shared this article. Tabloid campaigns are a characteristic way of how authorities treat critical-oriented NGOs that deal with important social issues. The National Convention on the European Union condemned the "malicious and organized campaign" against BCSP and added that "the systematic abuse of tabloids and other media to destroy the reputation of civil society organizations has become a daily occurrence in Serbia".

Pressure and persecution of representatives of the "Sloga" Postal Workers' Union

The United Trade Unions of Serbia "Sloga" condemned the persecution of the representatives of the Post Office Workers' Union "Sloga", Stefan Mitrović and Zoran Pavlović. Mitrović and Pavlović received a new annex to the Employment Agreement, and if they do not sign it, they are threatened with dismissal. Postmen on suspension of work, who do not belong to any trade union, are also threatened with warnings before dismissal. The pressures on the employees of The Post of Serbia have intensified since the company's employees went on strike due to "unbearable social poverty and the volume of work to which the management does not respond at all and has been making empty promises for years". The inadmissible pressures to which union representatives and employees are exposed is a gross violation of the freedom of association of workers.

Suspended sentences for the attackers on the "Black Ram" Cafe

Two attackers on the "Black Ram" Caffe and its guests were sentenced to suspended prison terms for the attack that took place on January 15 of this year in Novi Sad. On that occasion, the owner of the bar Bojan Šovljanski, and his colleague were injured, and property damage was caused to this cafe, known as a gathering place for anti-fascists. The cafe is often the target of attacks by neo-fascist groups, and this year alone the cafe was attacked 9 times. Suspended sentences for the attackers do not give hope that they will prevent similar attacks in the future that threaten the safety of all those who gather in this place.

