



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

November 17 - November 30, 2023

Freedom of Expression

The owner of KTV is the target of attacks and pressures

Danijel Radić, the owner of Zrenjanin's KTV has been exposed to pressure and attacks for a long period of time by, as he claims, local criminals connected with the authorities in that city. On October 28, Radić was physically attacked by a group of men with axes and rods. The last in a series of incidents happened on November 15, when Radić noticed that the screws on the wheels of his car were unscrewed. The journalist believes that the incidents are politically motivated, because, as he states, of "KTV reporting that does not favor the Serbian Progressive Party". Radić regularly reported the attacks he was subjected to, however, he was also subjected to pressure from the police themselves, who, on one occasion, stopped him for no reason and tested him for the presence of drugs and alcohol, and then one of the police officers told him that "they received an order and that he should be careful until the election because this is a private state and private police". Appeals to reveal and punish those who threaten and attack journalists seem insufficient in a situation where the institutions of the system that should protect journalists are the ones who perpetuate that violence.

Arrest and apartment search because of the tweets

Dragan Subotić, a pensioner from Obrenovac, was detained on November 15 in Mirijevo where he was at that time due to business obligations. Dragan was taken into custody, then his family house was searched and his phone was confiscated, and the reason given was the pensioner's writing on Platform X (former Twitter), which was characterized as a threat to the security of the President of the state, Aleksandar Vučić. As it was established that there is no real danger to safety, Dragan will not be fined or punished, but what remains is a warning and a threat to all those who are critical of the government and that any public expression of opinion will not go unnoticed and without certain repercussions.

Tabloid campaign against actors due to public criticism of the authorities

Actors Ammar Mešić and Stevan Piale found themselves targeted by pro-regime tabloids after they publicly spoke out against the current government in the previous period. The text, which was shared by several tabloids, accuses the actors of taking money "for their criticism of the authorities and participation in Serbia against violence protests". Actor Ammar Mešić was, after writing an open letter to President Aleksandar Vučić after the tragedy at the "Vladislav Ribnikar" Elementary School, fired from a TV show in which he had been playing for years. The reckoning of the authorities, through the tabloids, with all those who dare to publicly express their views has become a common practice in our country, and it is one of the main characteristics of non-democratic regimes.

Damaged journalist's car

On the night between November 20 and 21, the car of Nenad Živadinović, a journalist from the portal Ritam grada from Kragujevac, was damaged. As the windshield was broken on this car only, the journalist believes that it was not a coincidence and that the attack has something to do with his profession. Destruction of journalists' property is a direct attempt to intimidate and hinder their free work, and institutions are obliged to provide special protection to journalists who face threats, attacks, and pressures.

False bomb reports on RTS and RTV

In the past two weeks, RTS and Radio Belgrade received two reports about a bomb, and RTV three reports, which were found to be false after checking by special units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The first tip came on November 21, and the second just a few days later on November 24. This is not the first time that false reports have been sent to RTV's email address, which has received as many as 4 false reports in the last three months. The evacuation of employees, which is a standard procedure in such situations, adversely affects the work of journalists. The day after the first false bomb report, the RTS daily news was exposed to hacker attacks, which delayed its broadcast.

Punctured tires on the car of critics of the government

Unknown persons punctured the tires of a resident of Baničina, who is an open critic of the government of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Attacks on freedom of expression have further intensified during the ongoing election campaign.

The journalist removed from the trial

Member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, Veran Matić, has been removed from the trial of Dejan Nikolić Kantar, who is on trial for threatening the head of the Vranje Police Department. The court dismissed Matić at the request of the defendant, who was sentenced to 18 months in prison last year for endangering the safety of employees at OK Radio. Matić expresses concern over the fact that in this way the public is prevented from being informed about court proceedings.

Journalists are not welcome at the meeting

Journalists from N1, Nova and portal O21.rs were prevented from attending the meeting between the government and farmers. Although it was initially planned that journalists from the mentioned media would attend the meeting, in the end, at the proposal of the Government of Serbia, and with the consent of the representatives of farmers, it was decided that only "agrarian journalists" would attend the meeting. Prime Minister Ana Brnabić said that the farmers proposed that representatives of 5 media attend the meeting, but that the Government said that "either everyone or no one can go". The Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina reminded the Government of Serbia, farmers' associations, and the entire public of Article 14 of the Law on Public Information, which reads: "Public information is free and not subject to censorship. Direct and indirect discrimination of editors, media and other persons in the field of public information is prohibited, especially according to their political orientation and beliefs or other personal characteristics."

Postponed trial regarding the blocking of OK Radio

In the Basic Court in Vranje, the trial of Stefan Ilić, the director of the company "Colloseum gest", regarding the illegal construction of the windows of the OK Radio premises was postponed. This company is connected to Dejan Nikolić Kantar, a controversial businessman from Vranje, who was convicted of threatening and endangering the safety of employees of this radio station. This is not the first time that the trial has been postponed in cases related to Kantar, and the doctor who wrote reports about the impossibility of coming to court for Kantar this time also did the same for Stefan Ilić. By delaying the court proceedings, the pressure that OK Radio employees are exposed to continues.

Freedom of Assembly

Incident at the farmer's protest

A minor incident happened at the farmers' protest in Bavanište when an unknown truck driver approached the barricade from the opposite direction and thus blocked the emergency passage. Although the police were present, they did not react. We remind you that in recent weeks there have been protests by farmers dissatisfied with the Government's attitude towards their demands. The farmers decided to point out their problems by blocking the traffic, and because of that they are exposed to different pressures, so the president of Serbia said that the protesting farmers are "putting their hands in the pockets of the citizens", which instead of solving problems only leads to its further deepening and spreading intolerance towards those exercising their constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of assembly.

Freedom of Association

Spy attacks on mobile phones of members of civil society

The SHARE Foundation established that on August 16, there were unsuccessful attempts at spying on two mobile devices of civil society representatives. Cooperation with international organizations has confirmed Apple's warning, which states that the phones of two representatives of civil society are potential targets of state-sponsored technical attacks. This kind of attack is a direct attack on the entire civil society and represents a serious threat to the independent, free and unhindered work of the civil sector. The SHARE Foundation warns that spyware attacks on critical public representatives have a devastating impact on democracy and human rights, especially in the pre-election period, and that the use of spyware is illegal and incompatible with democratic values.

The policeman illegally ID'd the students

A student and member of the informal group "Students against Violence" Pavle Cicvarić and his colleagues were approached at the Prokop railway station by a policeman who, without explanation, identified them and photographed their ID cards. The students were on their way to the forum of the "ProGlas" initiative in Novi Sad, and Cicvarić interprets this event as an attempt at intimidation. We remind you that Pavle Cicvarić, due to his activist involvement in the "Serbia against violence" protests, was previously targeted by representatives of the authorities, who misused the lectern in the Serbian Parliament and disclosed personal information about the student's family members.

Targeted organization from Novi Sad

Posters with Ustasha symbols appeared in Novi Sad, labeling the Youth Student Action (OSA) organization as an "anti-Serb" and "treasonous" organization. OSA is a youth and activist organization "in the fight against the regime of violence and crime". In recent years, Novi Sad has become known for attacks and intimidation of organizations and individuals who oppose the growing violence in society and who oppose the spread of neo-fascist and neo-Nazi ideas, and such attacks are most often carried out by members of extreme right-wing groups.

Association "Svetionik" targeted by the tax authorities

The Tax Administration of Novi Pazar passed a decision on the retroactive taxation of the association "Svetionik" from that work, which is why 30,000 euros intended to support children without parental care were forcibly removed from the association's account. The tax administration from Novi Pazar retroactively taxed scholarships and assistance to children without parental care, considering them as wages for the guardian. The association filed a complaint with the Tax Administration in Kragujevac, which rejected the original decision of the Tax Administration in Novi Pazar.

Attacked activist

Veljko Raković, civil activist and one of the organizers of the "Raška against violence" protest, was attacked on November 29. in that city. Three unknown men intercepted the activist, knocked him to the ground and kicked him. Fortunately, Raković suffered minor physical injuries, but this case of physical attack is still worrying and points to the increasingly pronounced use of violence against government critics in our country.

Millions of euros for phantom associations

Balkan Investigative Reporting Network and Civic Initiatives published research that showed that a network of phantom organizations raffled off the money at public tenders aimed at women, youth, and families. In this way, at least five million euros were extracted from the Ministry of Family Care and Demography in 2021. Instead of the money being directed to organizations that dedicatedly and responsibly provide much-needed services in the community, it was diverted to a network of affiliated organizations that falsified reports on their activities. The mechanism was simple: the organization would apply for a public tender, receive money, then transfer it to private agencies, and send falsified reports on activities and spending. The Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime has begun to act on the criminal complaint filed by the Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM) against the former Minister of Family Care and Demography, Ratko Dmitrović, for abuse of public tenders.

The co-owner of Galens lost the lawsuit against the activists

The court's second-instance verdict confirmed the verdict of the Basic Court in Novi Sad, in favor of environmental activists who were sued by the co-owner of Galens, Sanja Petrić, due to movement on her plot on Fruška Gora. In October 2021, activists protested against the fencing of a part of the national park zone, and Petrić sued activist Dragana Arsić from the "Defend the Forests of Fruška Gora" Movement, Nikola Arežina from the "Fruškać" Association, and Petar Živanović and Dušan Tomić. This is not the first time that the co-owner of Galens sues environmental activists, but the decision of the High Court in Novi Sad to confirm the first-instance verdict is a positive step in recognizing SLAPP lawsuits aimed at preventing activists from their public activities.

