



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

December 1 - December 14, 2023

Freedom of Expression

Šapić insulted a journalist and activist

The current mayor of Belgrade, Aleksandar Šapić, insulted the journalist and activist Dušan Čavić, calling him a "donkey" and "idler". When asked by a journalist why he did not visit the "Vladislav Ribnikar" Elementary School, Šapić reacted violently and in a manner unbecoming of the position he holds. The verbal attack on the journalist and activist is just one more in a series of inappropriate behavior by the mayor in relation to the media and citizens who are critical of his work at the head of the city.

Artist arrested because for graffiti

Artist Andrej Josifovski Pianist was arrested on December 5 in front of the Serbian Parliament after writing graffiti. On the mentioned graffiti, written with snow spray that can be easily removed, it was written "Mom, how come the horses ride the people?". The police arrested the artist and also identified passers-by who were then in front of the Assembly. The artist was released on the same day, but this case is indicative of the state of freedom of speech in Serbia, which is under increased attack during the pre-election campaign.

The policewoman obstructed the N1 team

When the N1 television crew came in front of a high school in Belgrade to record a report on bomb threats, a policewoman approached them and asked the crew questions about the reason for their arrival at the location. The policewoman suspiciously questioned the team and thereby prevented reporting and the unhindered performance of journalistic work.

The tabloid publisher sued KRIK

Mondo INC, the publisher of the Kurir tabloid, sued KRIK and the publishers of 6 other media outlets, including N1, Danas and Cenzolovka, for, as the lawsuit states, unfair competition and damage to reputation. A payment in the amount of 11 million dinars is requested from the defendant media, and the reason was the transmission of the Raskrinkavanje (Debunking) analysis, which presented data on the number of unfounded, biased or manipulative news published on the front pages of the pro-government tabloid Kurir during 2022. The previous publisher of Kurir also sued KRIK due to earlier analyzes of the Raskrinkavanje, and the proceedings in this case are still ongoing. With these lawsuits, Kurir is trying to dissuade the media from reporting on the violation of basic journalistic codes, and it can be said that this is another SLAPP lawsuit aimed at preventing the actions of professional media.

There is still no final verdict in the case of the burning of the journalist's house

Five years have passed since the burning of the house of journalist Milan Jovanović from Grocka, and there is still no final verdict. In March of this year, the second basic court once again sentenced the former president of the Grocka Municipality, Dragoljub Simonović, to 5 years in prison, while the other defendants in this case were sentenced to a total of 12 years. However, it has been waiting since October for the Court of Appeal to schedule a public session and decide on the appeals of the first defendant Simonović. Due to the persistent delay of the whole procedure, those who most directly threatened the life of the journalist and his family are still at large, and the attacked journalist never received compensation for the damage caused. "I only know that there is no justice in a country that is unjust," Milan Jovanović said for Cenzolovka, and this case continues to warn the public about the risk independent journalists are exposed to in Serbia.

Freedom of Assembly

The police banned the pro-Palestinian rally

The "Support to the People of Palestine Serbia" initiative announced on its Instagram account that they received a decision from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia (MUP) to ban the protest rally scheduled for December 10. In the explanation of MUP, it is stated that the announced rally must not be held due to the threat to the safety of people and property, it is also stated that "there is a possibility that in the area of registered for the holding of public gatherings and public gatherings on the move, especially in front of diplomatic consular representations of Israel and the USA gather a large number of Palestinians and persons who support them, which could lead to endangering the safety of people and property in the said area". This discriminatory explanation of the MUP is based on racist assumptions about the alleged propensity of Palestinians towards violence. The protest rally in solidarity with the people of Palestine was held without going to the embassies of Israel and the USA, and it passed without any incidents, as in the previous two cases when it was held.

Freedom of Association

Pressures on CEPRIS members

The Center for Judicial Research (CEPRIS) announced that its two members, prosecutor Bojana Savović and lawyer Sofija Mandić, are exposed to pressure. The prosecutor of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade, Nenad Stefanović, filed the so-called "initiative for giving an opinion" to the Ethics Committee of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office, which requests that the statements of prosecutor Bojana Savović in a television program "Utišak nedelje" be reviewed. Another member of CEPRIS, Sofija Mandić, was in the organization's premises when two unknown men came, on the same day that Stefanović filed the initiative against the prosecutor. The organization suspects that the visit by the unknown men aimed to intimidate the CEPRIS members. The organization announced that these events are part of a series of "pressures and threats that the current regime has been tightening around the neck of non-governmental organizations in Serbia, especially CEPRIS, for years".

Pressure on union representatives

After a letter from 4 trade unions, sent to the addresses of several officials, in which requests are made for changes in the management and operations of "Energetika" d.o.o. Kragujevac, there was pressure on union representatives. In a letter, the unions announced that they would go on a warning strike from December 4 to 8, but after pressure, 3 unions gave up on the announced strike. The special advisor to the Minister of Labor, Mira Basta, "warned" the union representatives that the strike would be "a blow to the state and an influence on the political elections". From the United Trade Union of Serbia "Sloga", they believe that "Mira Basta used her position to influence workers' dissatisfaction and prevent protests and strikes". This is an unacceptable interference in the work of the trade union and a gross violation of basic workers' rights.

Activist Aladin Paučinac was attacked

Aladin Paučinac, a civil activist from Novi Pazar, was attacked while commenting live on social media about the construction works in a neighborhood in that city. Aladdin was attacked, with curses, insults and pushing, by a man who was previously convicted for violent behavior towards another activist. The aggressive behavior of the man was recorded on video, and the question arises as to what the bullies are ready for when the cameras are turned off. Attacks on activists in Serbia are happening more and more often in public spaces, and there is a growing concern for their safety, and the goal of such attacks is to stifle freedom of speech.

Graffiti written at the entrance to the premises of the union "Sloga"

On the night between December 12 and 13, unknown persons wrote graffiti at the entrance to the premises of United Trade Unions of Serbia "Sloga". Although the message written on graffiti is unclear and grammatically incorrect, the union announced that they "consider the written words to be a direct threat". Vandalizing trade union premises is another type of pressure to which trade unions fighting for the improvement of working conditions and the position of workers in our country are exposed. The same messages were written on the doors of the premises of several opposition parties.

Civil society in Serbia is obstructed

For the fifth year in a row, in the annual report of the global alliance of civil society organizations, CIVICUS, Serbia has been rated as a country where civil society activities are obstructed. Thus, Serbia found itself in the "company" of countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary and Poland. The report points to cases of excessive use of violence by police against environmental activists, attacks on journalists, exposure to SLAPP lawsuits, and pressures faced by union representatives. Examples of threats to fundamental freedoms in our country include, among others, SLAPP lawsuits filed by the current mayor of Belgrade, Aleksandar Šapić, against the Balkan Research Network of Serbia (BIRN) and the physical confrontation between the police and environmental activists in Šodros. On December 5, the first session of the Council for the creation of an encouraging environment for the development of civil society was held, so it remains to be seen in the coming period whether the intention of the authorities is to really improve the circumstances in which the civil society in Serbia finds itself through the work of this body.

