



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

January 12 - January 25, 2024

Freedom of Expression

Threats to N1 journalists

A threatening email was sent to the email address of the N1 web editorial office, in which, in addition to a series of insults, it is stated that "(journalists) will have bloody heads". Igor Božić, program director of N1, said that what worries them is that so far no one has been held accountable in the case of threats to this television. Online threats to the media and journalists should be taken seriously because this type of intimidation can also manifest itself live, which is what happened near the end of last year when a man physically assaulted a journalist from N1 television while reporting from a protest. Attacks on independent media occur in the context of negative rhetoric that the representatives of the authorities regularly spread and are thus most responsible for creating an atmosphere in which journalists of these media are exposed to constant threats to their lives and safety.

An attempt to hack the journalist's social networks

Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (IJAS) submitted a report to the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime because of multiple attempts to hack the Instagram account of GINS journalist Ivana Milosavljević. The journalist gained recognition after she discovered the Serbian Progressive Party's call center and, through her research, pointed out the potential mechanisms of buying votes in elections. IJAS believes that the investigative work of the journalist is the main reason for the attack on her social media account.

Threats to the editorial office of Cenzolovka

On the Facebook page of Cenzolovka, in the comments on the news about how to protect journalists reporting from the protest, a man left a threatening comment to the editorial staff of this portal and all journalists. Reporters Without Borders and the International Press Institute condemned the death threats to the editorial office of Cenzolovka, and the case was reported to the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.

Nationalist hunt for journalists

For days, N1 journalist Vanja Đurić and Nova S journalist Željko Veljković have been the target of verbal attacks on platform X for commenting on the performance before the Red Star match in which a girl from Kosovo sang a nationalist song. Although the journalist's comments did not refer to the girl, but to the general socio-political climate in the country, they very quickly came under attack from politicians in the government, but also from certain right-wing parties, and a large number of unknown persons who misused the mention of the child in order to insult journalists. Journalists were labeled as "Serb-haters", and some of the comments included open death threats. This was followed by an orchestrated campaign in pro-regime tabloids, which regularly targets critical media. A day later, on social networks and in tabloids, last year's episode of Nova S television from the "Mirëdita, good day!" festival, in which journalist Jelena Obućina and Željko Veljković greet viewers in Albanian, was misused. Pro-government tabloids manipulatively presented these recordings as if they were published on the day of commemoration of the massacre in Račko in Kosovo and Metohija. It is not the first time that an orchestrated campaign has been conducted against the media critical of the government, but what makes this campaign stand out is the extremely nationalistic character that marks journalists as "enemies of the state", which directly puts them in danger and exposes them to the risk of attacks. The report for Serbia by the international non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch points out that independent journalists continue to face intimidation, threats and violence, and that the state's response to these problems is inadequate.

Nova.rs journalist attacked

A security guard physically pushed out a journalist from the Nova.rs portal and prevented him from attending the Red Star basketball match, even though the journalist had accreditation. On that occasion, the journalist's phone was confiscated, which was later returned to him after the recordings were deleted from it. The police were called, but no one came to the field, which indicates the complete lack of protection of journalists by the institutions of the system, which are obliged to guarantee their safety, and not, on the contrary, to expose them to increased risk.

Criminal complaint against Bujanovačke journalist

The director of the "Branko Radičević" Elementary School from Bujanovac filed a criminal complaint against Bujanovačke portal journalist Ivana Jovanović for writing about the reconstruction of the school. Following the report, the police came to the premises of this portal to take a statement from the journalist. Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia states that it is about "serious pressure on the media" and that "It is important for parents and other citizens to have objective and true information about the conditions for working at school, and it is of fundamental interest that the public will be informed about the real situation in this institution".

Journalists denied accreditation

Journalists from television N1 and Nova were denied accreditation to cover the constitutive session of the assembly of the city of Kraljevo. The president of the Provisional Authority of the city of Kraljevo, Predrag Terzić, refused to issue accreditations to journalists. In this way, journalists are prevented from performing their work and reporting in the interest of the public.

Hrkaločić among the European record holders for SLAPP lawsuits

In the contest for SLAPP politician and country of the year, organized by the European CASE coalition, former state secretary in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia, Dijana Hrkaločić, was nominated among the candidates. Hrkaločić filed 11 lawsuits against journalists from different media. This infamous nomination placed the former MUP official among those who abuse the legal system with the aim of economic and time exhaustion and intimidation of journalists, media and activists.

Freedom of Assembly

The student remains in custody

Student Dimitrije Radovanović remains under house arrest after the appeal against this decision was rejected. We remind you that Dimitrije was arrested at a protest on December 24, after which he was sentenced to house arrest, and since then he has been in a student dormitory. The repression to which the student is exposed is an indicator of legal violence carried out by the institutions of the system in accordance with the political will of the ruling regime.

Freedom of Association

Attacks on CRTA

Prime Minister Ana Brnabić again attacked the Center for Research, Transparency and Responsibility (better known as CRTA), and this time she called them "the political platform of Dilas". Attacks on CRTA by the Prime Minister, as well as other members of Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), have been happening almost every day since the elections were held on December 17. After the Prime Minister, SNS official Vladimir Đukanović joined in targeting the organization, writing on his account on Platform X that "those from CRTA should be arrested for deceiving the public about the alleged theft, as well as disturbing the public. Also, CRTA as a lobbying organization should be banned". It is not the first time that Đukanović has called for the banning of non-governmental organizations, which has become a practice in many authoritarian regimes around the world. With its observation mission, CRTA pointed out the abuses that took place during the election day, and the attacks they have been exposed to since then point to the disincentive conditions in which civil society organizations that stand for democratic values and civic activism operate.

Šapić criticizes Roma organizations

The President of the Temporary Authority of the City of Belgrade, Aleksandar Šapić, accused Roma organizations of "taking money from international non-governmental organizations on the topic of Roma for decades, but they are asleep when Roma are really threatened and when someone attacks them". Šapić made this statement while visiting a City Cleanliness worker who was attacked on a national basis while he was working. With his statement, Šapić continues to target non-governmental organizations, bringing them into the context of "foreign mercenaries", and on this occasion he once again made a discriminatory statement about the Roma community, which is not the first time this has happened. In the past, on several occasions, in his public appearances, he showed a lack of understanding of the position of Roma people in Serbia, and his statements influenced the strengthening of stereotypes about Roma. The same organizations, which Šapić is now attacking, had to react several times when the mayor expressed offensive views, for which he never apologized or took responsibility for the intolerance that such statements can incite towards this already multiple threatened and marginalized community in the country.