



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

January 26 - February 8, 2024

Freedom of Expression

Šapić refuses to communicate with N1 television

The president of the temporary institutions of Belgrade, Aleksandar Šapić, said that he has stopped all communication with N1 television and refuses to answer the questions of the journalists of this television. Representatives of numerous national and international journalistic associations reminded that it is the duty of public officials to answer all journalistic questions and that this decision of Aleksandar Šapić is in contradiction with the Law on Public Information and Media. This statement of the mayor came a day after the president aggressively answered the questions of the N1 journalist. The attitude of state officials towards critical media is an indicator of the worrying state of freedom of expression in Serbia.

N1 team prevented from attending the session

By the decision of the secretary of the municipality of Knić, the media, of which only N1 was present in the hall at that moment, was prohibited from attending the constitutive session of the municipal assembly. This practice has already been repeated a couple of times after the elections in several local self-government units, which represents a dangerous trend, the spread of which threatens to inform citizens about the activities of public authorities.

Suspended sentence for attacking a journalist

The Municipal Court in Niš sentenced Nikola Panić to a suspended prison sentence for the attack on journalist Srđan Nonić in January last year. Panić, who is employed in the city administration, attacked a journalist who filmed him staying in the casino during working hours. On that occasion, Panić chased Nonić and threatened to "break his arms and legs". It is expected that the second-instance verdict will confirm the decision against the bully who threatened the life and safety of the journalist, and thus showed what challenges journalists face at the local level.

Campaign against In Media

The portal In Media from Indija found itself the target of attacks after writing about an inappropriate gift that the municipality gave to children. The journalists of this media were insulted through the official municipal Facebook platform, and even some parents joined in putting pressure on the employees of this portal. The president of the municipality of Indija accused the portal of leading "political rebellions through children", and all the portal's interlocutors on this topic are also exposed to pressure. Local media are faced with numerous challenges in their work, and every type of pressure they are exposed to is aimed at preventing professional reporting in the interest of the public, which most directly stifles freedom of speech and the right of citizens to timely and accurate information.

KRIK journalists acquitted by lawsuit

KRIK journalists Dragana Pećo and Vesna Radojević were acquitted following the lawsuit filed by Nikola Petrović, former director of "Elektromreža Srbije" and close friend of the president. Petrović sued the journalists for allegedly publishing personal data as part of KRIK's investigation into his offshore company. The judge of the Municipal Court in Belgrade, in pronouncing the verdict, pointed out that the court determined that the published data were not personal, and thus the journalists were exempted from lawsuits. This is not the first lawsuit filed by Nikola Petrović against the journalist Pećo, nor the first lawsuit filed against KRIK by persons close to the ruling regime or persons who are an integral part of it. We are talking about a double-digit number of SLAPP lawsuits aimed at preventing KRIK journalists from pointing out to the public the link between crime and the state through their investigative journalism.

Freedom of Assembly

Police interrogated young activists

The informal group "SviĆe" announced that their activists were invited to the police stations for informative interviews the day after the performance when they left cabbages in front of several city and municipal administrations. With this action, the representatives of this group wanted to point out the disorganization of the voter list. It is not clear how the police obtained information about the participants of this action, and among those who were detained there was an activist who did not participate in the action at all. The "SviĆe" group was created in May 2023, but their activities became more visible to the public after the elections in December, after which they organized a series of blockades and actions to point out election irregularities. Police actions are a form of institutional pressure aimed at intimidating and preventing young people from further participating in political life through civic activism.

Student in custody

Dimitrije Popovski, a painting student who was arrested on the day of the protest in front of the Belgrade City Assembly on December 24, is still under house arrest. Dimitrije is one of the two students who have been in custody for a month, and he will potentially be charged for one of the two serious crimes: attempting to subvert the constitutional order and violent behavior. Another student, Dimitrije Radovanović, was charged with violent behavior. The institutions' repressive treatment of students sends a message to young people that participation in the political space through activism and exercising the basic right of citizens to peaceful assembly is punishable if it is not in the service of the ruling party.

Expulsion of another Russian in Serbia

A Russian citizen, who has been living in Serbia for four years, was ordered to leave the country because the Security Information Agency assessed that she represented an "unacceptable security risk". Elena Koposova believes that the only reason for the decision to expel her from the country is that she signed an open address by members of the Russian diaspora regarding the war in Ukraine. With the decisions of the security services, our country punishes anti-war activities and expels Russian citizens who oppose Russian aggression against Ukraine in any way.

Freedom of Association

Targeting of the activist from Futog

Posters with the image of Dalibor Čalić from the "Futog Initiative" Association are plastered all over this place. The poster, which is pasted next to the death certificates, is signed by the group "Futožani 21410", and Dalibor believes that this action is connected with the status he posted on Facebook. A few days later, Futog was plastered with a new round of posters targeting this activist again. Placing posters around the city on which activists are presented indicates the existence of a kind of "hunt" for all those who dare to think critically about socio-political issues and act accordingly in the public space.

The security of the Pride Info Center was attacked

On February 3, after tearing the LGBTQ+ flag in front of the Pride Info Center, an unknown man physically assaulted the association's security guard. This is the first time that one of the center's employees has been attacked, but it is not the first act of vandalism against the premises of the association, which is regularly the target of right-wing attacks.

The facility of the Association of Parents of Children with Autism was robbed

During the night of February 1, a building under construction in Bačko Gradište, which belongs to the Association of Parents for Children with Autism "Svoj svet", was robbed. It is a building that should be a day care center for children with autism, and after this incident the association announced that they were blocked from further work because everything that was most valuable was stolen.

Vučić accused NGOs and the media of waging a "hybrid war" against Serbia

The president of all citizens of Serbia accused certain media and non-governmental organizations of waging a "hybrid war" against Serbia. Vučić said that the artillery for waging war is the media, and that money comes, among others, from non-governmental organizations. The president's rhetoric ominously returns to the 1990s, when these types of spinning and targeting were a regular occurrence, and the consequences of such attacks were fatal. With his accusations against the non-governmental sector and the media that they are waging war against Serbia, President Vučić creates panic and raises tension in the public, creates an atmosphere of constant fear of possible wars and crises, but also most directly threatens the safety of individual citizens of this country in order to achieve his personal political goals.