



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

February 23 - March 7, 2024

Freedom of Expression

Death threats to N1 journalists

On the N1 website, an unknown person left a comment threatening the editorial staff. The comment stated that "they know where (journalists) live and what cars they drive" and that "they will all be killed". Attacks on journalists of N1 television are not surprising given the conditions in which government representatives regularly accuse them of being "traitors", "foreign mercenaries", "working against their country". Government representatives, in their identification with the state, treat critical media with impudence and are thus directly responsible for all pressures and threats, and unfortunately more often physical attacks to which journalists of those media are exposed.

Brnabić targets the media and NGOs

Following the example of the president, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić accused the United Group media and non-governmental organizations of creating several months of instability in the country after the elections. Brnabić, at the media conference regarding the ODIHR report on the elections in Serbia, stated that the media published the report before the ODIHR in order to "continue to create a false narrative". The Prime Minister's targeting of the media comes a day after death threats were sent to the N1 newsroom.

Freedom House: Serbia is a leader in reducing rights and civil liberties

In the report of the international organization Freedom House for the year 2023, Serbia recorded the biggest decline in Europe in terms of political rights and civil liberties. Serbia is in 114th place among 195 countries in the world and thus is classified as a partly free country. The report states that "the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) constantly violates political rights and civil liberties, exerting pressure on independent media, political opposition and civil society organizations." Freedoms in Serbia have been in constant decline for the past 10 years.

Šapić refused to answer N1 question

As he announced, Aleksandar Šapić continues to refuse to answer questions from N1 television. At the press conference, after the second attempt to constitute the city assembly, Šapić listened, but refused to answer the question of a journalist from this television. This is a direct violation of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, which guarantees everyone the right to be truthfully, completely and timely informed about matters of public importance. A day later, at a conference in the premises of the Serbian Progressive Party, prime minister Ana Brnabić "joined in solidarity" with Šapić in refusing to answer journalists' questions and thus stood in solidarity with the violation of the Constitution and the disrespect of the citizens of Serbia. By the actions of the former mayor and prime minister, citizens are prevented from enjoying their right to information and are deprived of information that is in the interest of the public.

Security pushed the journalist out of the municipality

A security officer of the Municipality of Inđija kicked out the journalist of the IN Media portal, Verica Mariničić, from the Municipality building, where at that moment a meeting of the residents with the President of the Municipality was taking place. Security physically pushed the journalist out, stating that she was "not on the list". The Union of Journalists and Media Workers of Serbia (SINOS) announced that according to the Law on Private Security, a member of that service must not physically touch the party, and that the attacker must be held accountable in the event of such an action. The attack on the journalist of IN Media takes place a month after this media was the target of an organized manhunt, which originated from the official municipal Facebook platform. This is another in a series of attacks on journalists in Serbia, which according to the report of the Council of Europe is at the top in terms of the number of attacks on media workers.

Freedom of Association

Minister attacks "ProGlas"

Minister of Justice Maja Popović accused the "ProGlas" initiative of working to "destabilize state bodies". The minister made this statement in response to the minimum conditions for holding new elections that the signatories of the initiative presented to the public. Accusations against the "ProGlas" initiative that they are working to destabilize the state come at a time when the international community has recognized that it is necessary to conduct an investigation into the irregularities that were recorded on December 17, but also during the entire election process. The collapse of citizens' trust in the work and integrity of state institutions, which the minister is talking about, would not have happened if the institutions of our country had responded in a timely manner to the reports of election theft, which were pointed out by domestic vigilantes, but also by citizens during the election day.

Arrest of members of the Military Union

On February 27, the police searched the apartments of several members of the Military Union, including the apartment of the president of that union, Novica Antić. Antić was arrested together with two other members of the union leadership, on suspicion of having committed the criminal offense of embezzlement. However, the lawyers of those arrested believe that political motives are behind this action. The arrest took place only a week after the Minister of Defense Miloš Vučević stated that the unions in the army are the biggest stupidity and that he will advocate for their abolition, which is in direct contradiction to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and the laws that guarantee workers the right to freedom joining unions, which the minister, as a law graduate, should be familiar with. Novica Antić, as the president of the trade union, often publicly criticized the state's attitude towards the defense sector. "We think that the goal of everything is to replace the current leadership of the Military Union of Serbia and to replace them with people who are loyal to certain structures in the army and the state," said Novica Antić's lawyer. The arrested were released on February 28, but a day later they were remanded in custody for up to 30 days. Due to the long-term pressures to which union members are exposed, the Military Union of Serbia launched an SOS telephone line for reporting mobbing and other pressures to which union members in the army are exposed. The need to introduce an SOS telephone line due to increasing pressure on members of the military union indicates the existence of the grossest violation of labor rights.

SNS activist tore up student posters

SNS activist Vukašin Đoković tore up posters that students from the informal organization "STAV" put up on the campus of the University of Novi Sad. The students wanted to point out the bad condition of the canteen and the dissatisfaction of the students, but a SNS activist prevented them from doing so. After the elections held on December 17, young people in Serbia became regular targets of attacks and victims of the repressive measures of the institutions of the system. Arrests, targeting and attacks are the methods used by the government to stifle any form of criticism that comes from young people who have always been initiators of change and opponents of authoritarian regimes.

The president is targeting the civil sector

The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, once again attacked civil society organizations at a press conference and, in the usual manner, accused them of a "conspiracy against Serbia". This time, the president went a step further and attacked Nikola Burazer, program director of the Center for Contemporary Policy, and falsely identified him as the author of Freedom House's "Freedom in the World" index report. Numerous international organizations report on human rights violations in Serbia, which the government tries to cover up with conspiracy theories and the targeting of domestic organizations that warn the public about suppression of basic freedoms and rights of citizens.