
THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS



Civic
Initiatives

freedom of expression

freedom of assembly

freedom of association

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

March 22 - April 4, 2024

Freedom of Expression

The singer threatens the newspaper Danas

The singer, Vlado Georgiev, known for spreading conspiracy theories, on his profile on platform X, called Danas journalists "anti-Serbian animals" and stated that this media "should be set on fire". In recent years, the singer has repeatedly used aggressive rhetoric towards journalists, but this is the first time that he has openly threatened the entire newsroom with death. Support for the singer in the attacks on Danas was also provided by the Conservative movement "Naši", which threatened to gather citizens in front of the newspaper's editorial office if they did not apologize for the published texts with which the members of this movement do not agree. It would not be the first time that this movement organizes a rally in front of the newsrooms of critical media. Nationalist rhetoric about "anti-Serb media" was used once again by Aleksandar Šapić in his already traditional belittling, insulting and targeting of N1 television.

A man attacked the N1 team

A member of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), Dejan Milenković, attacked the N1 team while they were filming a feature in Mala Krsna. The N1 team filmed the asphaltting of the street in this place, which came into the public spotlight after the publication of a TV report on the alleged organized transfer of the inhabitants of Mala Krsna to Belgrade in order to register to vote in the capital. Milenković tried to snatch the microphone from the journalist's hands and threatened to break the camera. Aggressive attitude towards journalists is promoted by the highest officials of SNS, and this model of behavior is transferred to all other, ordinary members of the party.

Hate graffiti against Dinko Gruhonjić

At the entrance to the building where journalist and professor Dinko Gruhonjić lives, hateful graffiti was written, threatening the program editor of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV). The graffiti is a continuation of the campaign that has been spreading for days in the pro-government media after the publication of an edited video in which the statements of Dinko Gruhonjić are manipulated. Furthermore, the head of the parliamentary group of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), Milenko Jovanov, spread false information about the statements and views of Professor Gruhonjić. Threats also began to arrive to the students who supported the journalist. Several incidents were recorded during the act of removing the hate graffiti. An unknown person tried to drive his car into the gathered citizens, and the man then got into a verbal argument with Gruhonjić. Before the assembly itself, a group of young men kicked the whitewashing equipment. Another threatening graffiti was written immediately after the graffiti removing action. In the meantime, the mobile phone number of the journalist and professor Gruhonjić was shared on social networks. Spreading hatred towards journalists unfit for the ruling party is part of the SNS policy, which most directly threatens the life and safety of journalists and their families. Threats to journalists in Serbia rarely receive a judicial epilogue, so those who carry out threats, as well as those who incite and initiate harassment campaigns, remain unpunished.

The president and the rector target the journalists

After an edited video in which professor and journalist Dinko Gruhonjić was presented as someone who glorifies the Ustasha regime, spread through social media, a group of people blocked the work of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. This group, which according to well-founded suspicions is not only made up of students of the Faculty of Philosophy, and some of them are suspected of being students at all, allegedly fights against "hate speech", while the young men in this group at the same time wear T-shirts with the image of Legija, convicted of murdering the Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić. The rector of the University of Novi Sad, instead of condemning this gross violation of the University's autonomy and violence against professors and students, sided with those blocking the faculty, and insulted the journalist of portal O21 who asked him questions. Rector Dejan Madić is a signatory of the list of public figures who supported Aleksandar Vučić, who himself joined in the smear campaign against the journalist. The President of Serbia said at the conference: "I think the worst about every word and every statement of Dinko Gruhonjić." What he said at the conference afterwards about the protection of journalists' safety and freedom of expression therefore means nothing, considering that the president himself is supporting false news about the professor and directly questioning journalists' safety and safety of his family. The previous statements of Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) officials and supporters show that in this case it is an organized hunt led by the ruling party, which has decided to remove all unsuitable people from the faculty, which is a step further towards the final suppression of freedom of expression, and thus of all other freedoms and human rights in Serbia.

Death threats addressed to journalist

Due to the writing about the illegal installation of a prefabricated building in Stara Pazova, journalist Gordana Ilić Momčilović received death threats from the wife of one of the owners of the illegal building. The woman stopped the journalist on the street and threatened that she would kill her. The journalist reported the case to the police, and it remains to be seen whether the woman will be held accountable for the threats addressed to Gordana. This is another in a series of cases that indicate the threatened safety of journalists in Serbia, especially those working locally and in smaller communities. According to the report of the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia, 50 attacks and 17 threats have been recorded since the beginning of this year alone.

The journalist was prevented from reporting from the session

Journalist Miroslav Mijatović was repeatedly not allowed to report from sessions of the Loznica City Assembly. Various excuses were used by the President of the Assembly to justify the discrimination against journalists. Mijatović states that he has been monitoring the sessions for years, but that this is the first time this is happening, and that's right after this journalist wrote about the alleged embezzlement in which the mayor was involved. Since the beginning of the year, there has been a noticeable trend of denying journalists the opportunity to cover sessions in several places throughout Serbia, such as Kragujevac, Kraljevo and Knić, which continues the discrimination of media reporting on issues of public interest.

The portal was condemned because of the text

The journalistic portal for investigating and reporting corruption, Pištaljka, was condemned for the article about the assets of SNS official Aleksandar Senić, even though the data transmitted is accurate and based on documents of state institutions. Senić, who is a director in Corridors of Serbia and a council member in the municipality of Rača, sued Pištaljka four times over a series of investigative texts about his property. The portal announced that it will appeal against this judgment of the High Court.

Criminal charges against journalists

The director of the preschool institution "Pčelica" filed a criminal complaint against the journalist Srđan Nonić for what the complaint says are "persecutions". The journalist claims that the allegations in the application are not true, and that it is actually pressure on the media, given that the Niš initiative portal, of which Nonić is the editor, has written several times about the situation in this preschool institution. This is not the first time that the leaders of "Pčelica" file complaints against Nonić and those who point to the poor functioning of this institution.

Lawsuit against the professor

The mayor of Bor, Aleksandar Milikić, sued the professor of the Technical Faculty, Snežana Šerbula, because of the statement that the professor made for television, which concerned the potential construction of a mini nuclear power plant in that city. The Network of Academic Solidarity and Engagement (MASA) stated in its statement: "It is difficult to imagine that any court, no matter how sympathetic to the regime, will actually uphold a lawsuit against a professor for a publicly expressed scientific opinion in her field of expertise." This is the second procedure before the judicial institutions that is conducted against the professor of the faculty, and about which the public learned in the past period. Previously, Zavetnici, the new coalition partners of SNS, filed a criminal complaint against professor and journalist Dinko Gruhonjić and journalist Ana Lalić for alleged hate speech. The hunting of academics and journalists, which is carried out by the ruling SNS, aims to stifle criticism and freedom of speech in the country, and the events in the recent period indicate the aspiration towards the final strengthening of the dictatorial regime in Serbia.

Freedom of Association

Destroyed association premises

The premises of the Society for Helping Mentally Underdeveloped Persons from Ruma were demolished by unknown persons. The case was reported to the police, who launched an investigation.