



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

April 5 - April 18, 2024

Freedom of Expression

Journalists are prohibited from asking questions

At the press conference of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the technical mandate Ivica Dačić and the Chairman of the OSCE, Jan Borg, journalists were forbidden to ask questions. Therefore, questions regarding the recommendations that the OSCE office ODIHR gave to Serbia for the improvement of election conditions could not be asked, and the public was deprived of information about the previous (in)action of the institutions of the system in this matter, as well as the attitude of international bodies towards the steps taken by Serbia towards the improvement of election conditions. Preventing journalists from asking questions at a press conference is a serious violation of freedom of expression.

The journalist removed from the session

Journalist of “Bujanovačke” Nikola Stevanović was removed from the meeting of the Headquarters for Emergency Situations in that city, with the explanation that the meeting was closed to the public, even though it was about a topic of public importance, namely the fire that broke out at the landfill and lasted for couple of days. The Independent Journalists Association of Serbia (IJAS) reminded that “discrimination against journalists and the media is prohibited and they demand that access be provided to all journalists who are interested in following a session.”

Leaflets thrown into the premises of Danas

The conservative movement “Naši” inserted leaflets into the entrance of the Danas editorial building. In addition to Danas, the media N1 and Nova S were also targeted on the leaflets. This is not the first time that this movement has carried out such an action. The fact that they have never been punished for endangering the safety of journalists gives them the feeling of being protected by the institutions and gives them an incentive to continue with actions and targeting of critical media.

The director discriminates journalists

The director of the Hospital in Palilula municipality, Aleksandar Stojanović, refused to answer the questions of the Nova.rs journalist, saying that as one of the founders of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), he will not make statements for this media. Aleksandar Šapić, the president of the temporary body of the city of Belgrade, introduced the practice of openly refusing to communicate with the media whose questions he does not like, and it is not surprising that this practice is gradually implemented by all other members of SNS, whether journalists address issues that are within their competence as public officials, not as a party officials. The arrogant attitude towards critical media is promoted by the highest state officials who regularly use the opportunity to deal with journalists and to treat them as political opponents.

Dinko Gruhonjić was verbally attacked on the street

Journalist and professor Dinko Gruhonjić was insulted and threatened with physical violence by an unknown man on the street. The attack comes after an orchestrated campaign against the professor, organized by government officials. So far, only some of the people who threatened Dinko, as well as journalist Ana Lalić, have been arrested. No one has been held accountable for writing hate graffiti at the entrance to the building where Gruhonjić lives with his family. Death threats began to arrive to the American ambassador after his visit to the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. The verbal attack on the street is an indicator of the dangerous consequences that public labeling leads to, and there is a justified growing fear for the safety of Dinko Gruhonjić, as well as other journalists who are targeted by representatives of the authorities.

The historic decline of democracy in Serbia

In Freedom House's "Nations in Transit" report, Serbia recorded a "historic decline" in democracy among the 29 countries included in the research. The main reasons are cited as: irregularities recorded during the election process, a drop in the rating of media independence and years of undermining the independence of the judiciary. The report states that the rating of media freedom has fallen due to "gradual, but overt, dominance of the ruling party in media coverage, increasing hostility and financial pressure on independent journalists, and the state's effective capture of public and private media." In the report, Serbia is classified as a hybrid regime, which is on the way to becoming a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime. The aforementioned tactics used by the government to stifle criticism, such as smearing, intimidation, and surveillance to which independent media, the civil sector, and the opposition in Serbia are exposed. The threat to basic freedoms, which domestic civil society organizations have been pointing out for years, is also recognized by international actors, but for now it seems that this has no major impact on the government in Serbia, which continues with its undemocratic practices.