



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

May 17 - May 30, 2024

Freedom of Expression

Abuse of artificial intelligence

On Pink TV, using artificial intelligence, edited statements of Savo Manojlović were shown in news broadcasts. It is not the first time that the owner of Pink, Željko Mitrović, uses such means, which he presents as a form of "joke, satire" and "author's format". However, the last time he "joked" in this way, among other things, at the expense of Aleksandar Vučić, Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) issued a statement in which they state that in the case of using artificial intelligence in the creation of program content, this should be clearly marked throughout the duration of the program. They also stated that media are obliged not to broadcast content that can abuse the gullibility of viewers. Although the announcement did not explicitly warn Pink TV, it is stated that "non-compliance with the aforementioned legal provision may lead to the initiation of the procedure for the imposition of measures provided for in the Law on Electronic Media." Pink once again disobeyed the laws of the Republic of Serbia and continues to question the future of freedom of expression. It remains to be seen whether REM will respond adequately and prevent the worrying phenomenon of abuse of artificial intelligence that, in this specific way, threatens democracy and the freedom of the electoral process.

A local official threatened a journalist

The deputy mayor of Čačak, Miroslav Petković, targeted the editor of the Ozonpress portal, Nebojša Jovanović, with a post on his Instagram story. The deputy shared the news that was published in the pro-government tabloids about the money that this media, as the project holder, received at the tender of the European Union Democracy Fund. Such targeting comes after a rally of the ruling party in Čačak, where Aleksandar Vučić, in his capacity as the president of the country, targeted opposition representatives for allegedly receiving money from a German foundation, even though the holders of power, including Vučić, are the ones who often boast of successful cooperation with Germany and partners from that country. The money that Ozonpress received concerns media projects in which 15 media from our country participate, and the only motive for the attack on this local media is to intimidate the remaining few media that report independently from the local area.

The journalist was prevented from asking a question

The media associate of the mayor of Novi Sad prevented the journalist from N1 from asking the mayor a question. The associate grabbed the journalist's hand, got in her face and, in an authoritative tone, forbade her to ask questions. The associate for the media very vividly showed the attitude of the authorities towards the media in Serbia, a relationship in which one side holds the rod in their hands and the other the microphone.

Lawsuit against the journalist from Pištaljka

The General Secretary of the Rowing Federation of Serbia, Vladimir Antić, sued Pištaljka journalist Snežana Đurić for allegedly "suffering mental pain due to injury to honor and reputation" and "unauthorized publication and display of other people's writings, portraits and videos". The lawsuit refers to the text about the revenge that the general secretary of this sports association carried out against the whistleblower who pointed out irregularities in the work of the association. The picture of Vladimir Antic published in the text is from the official website of the Rowing Association. The Pištaljka portal is a journalistic portal for investigating and reporting corruption, and this is not the first time that they have been the target of lawsuits by powerful people whose corruption affairs they reported on. In March of this year, they were convicted because of one such text, even though the information they conveyed was correct. Lawsuits against journalists and the media are aimed at silencing those who point to numerous abuses in the government, private and public companies and other institutions.

Journalist Vuk Cvijić was attacked

Milan Lađević, the editor of the pro-regime tabloid Srpski telegraf, punched Radar journalist Vuk Cvijić in the head. The attack took place on the street, and Cvijić assumes that the reason for the attack is that in his texts he wrote about the former head of the Novi Sad police, who is Lađević's godfather. If the physical attack on Cvijić goes unpunished, it will be a clear indication that the owners and editors of pro-regime tabloids are the extended arm of the government, which allows absolutely everything, even violence.

Another SLAPP lawsuit against KRIK

Another SLAPP lawsuit has arrived at the address of the research portal KRIK. This time, the lawsuit was filed by judge Dušanka Đorđević. KRIK states that this is "an unprecedented pressure on the work of the media and that it represents an attempt to prohibit journalists from reporting on the work and integrity of judges". We are in a situation where judges are abusing the law that they should adequately apply in practice.

Fredoom of Assembly

Fee for protest against femicide

Even the 9th femicide this year in Serbia is not enough of a sign for institutions that it is necessary to work on systemic social changes. Nevertheless, institutions work diligently to warn those who point to the widespread phenomenon of gender-based violence. Thus, the association "Women for Peace" from Leskovac received a notice from the Department for Communal-Housing Affairs from the city administration that they must pay a symbolic fee for the installation they put (pots with flowers), which reminds citizens of all murdered women and girls. Two days after commemorating the National Day of Remembrance for Women Victims of Violence, the Association received a letter that it had to pay a symbolic fee of 750 dinars, although the Association claims that they duly registered the assembly and installation. The association received a request to submit a sketch for the occupation of public space certified by an authorized designer, which is not usual in such situations. The representatives of the Association, at the press conference, expressed their doubt that they were punished in this way because of this, as well as earlier activities, with which they pointed out numerous problems at the local level. Although the sentence itself is low, it is an indicator of the attitude of the institutions towards the defenders, and especially the female defenders of human rights.

The activist was detained because of protests from last year

The activist from Mount Starica, Mladen Vladić, announced via social media, from a police squad car, that he was being detained from Majdanpek and taken to Negotin, due to the protest blockade of Gazela, which took place in August 2023. We remind you that the protest in August last year was organized by a group of environmental organizations with the aim of pointing out the ubiquitous violence in society, which affects both environmental activists, but also violence against nature in Serbia, which is increasingly exposed to destructive industrial practices.

Fredoom of Association

Vladimir Đukanović published the personal information of a CRTA member

The deputy of the Serbian Progressive Party, Vladimir Đukanović, published the personal data of the complainant, who is an employee of the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA), on Platform X in an announcement about the overthrow of the "Kreni-Promeni" list in a Belgrade municipality. Đukanović subsequently deleted the tweet, and then posted it again with obscured information. However, with the original publication, he violated the provisions of the Criminal Code, for which fines and prison sentences are provided.

The existence of the Russian Democratic Society was made impossible

Peter Nikitin, the founder of the Russian Democratic Society, announced that this association has been deleted from the register of legal entities and will continue to exist as an informal association of Russian anti-war volunteers. Nikitin explained that the association was rejected by 5 banks that verbally refused to open the association's account, as a result of which he was forced to delete the association from the register. Nikitin believes that they have been put on the "black list" considering what this association does. The Russian Democratic Society was founded with the aim of promoting democratic values and interests of the democratically oriented part of the Russian-speaking diaspora in Serbia. The association gained public attention for organizing protests against Russian aggression against Ukraine. Because of this, a significant number of Russian anti-war activists from Serbia faced decisions to expel them from Serbia. The last in line is the Tereh family, which did not even speak about the ongoing war. The freedom of association, guaranteed by the Constitution, is seriously threatened in this way, and the question of Russian influence on the internal affairs of our country is raised, which calls into question the declarative independence from external influences.

Targeting of peace activists

During his guest appearance on this pro-regime television channel, Pink TV and President Vučić misused the photos and statements of activist Mile Pajić as a means of a "dirty campaign by the coalition gathering around the Serbian Progressive Party against the Kreni-Promeni movement," the Youth Initiative for Human Rights announced. The resolution on Srebrenica is a leitmotif of the SNS campaign for the upcoming local elections, and by spin they are trying to present political opponents and the civil sector as those who allegedly mark the Serbian people as genocidal. In addition to Mila Pajić, an activist who has repeatedly been the target of nationalist persecution, YIHR program director Sofija Todorović has also been exposed to threats. She received threatening calls and messages with disturbing content, with a warning that her number would be published on Telegram groups where content calling for hatred and violence is shared. The government's campaign against the adoption of the Resolution on Srebrenica was transferred to the context of the June elections, demagogically presenting the ruling party as the one fighting for national interests, while the political opponents are the ones allegedly working against the people.

Protest leader arrested

Doka Ćurčić, one of the leaders of farmers' protests last year, and now the leader of a group of citizens participating in local elections, was arrested for allegedly writing graffiti against the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Ćurčić denies that he wrote graffiti and states that the arrest is "just a continuation of the pressure he has been suffering since he ran for the list for local elections". Although many billboards of opposition parties were destroyed during the pre-election campaign, it is not known that anyone was detained and arrested in those cases. The authorities react to offensive graffiti only if it relates to the SNS, while graffiti glorifying war criminals and spreading hatred and intolerance in society do not bother them.

A man attacked students of the informal group STAV

For the third time in a row, the elections for the student parliament of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad were interrupted, but this time there was also a physical attack on representatives of the informal group STAV by a member of the Serbian Progressive Party, Aleksandar Gajić. On that occasion, the man hit activist Mila Pajić and another student. By blocking the elections, the STAV group wants to point out the undemocratic nature of the elections at this faculty, where only one list with close political ties to the regime was nominated. During the blockade, there was a scuffle in which the vice-president of the election commission, in an attempt to push out the students of the STAV group, accidentally hit the current president of the student parliament, Ivana Macak, otherwise first on the list of the Russian party. Previously that day, Macak slapped her colleague Mila Pajić. The violence recorded on the day of these elections is a worrying indicator of the state of education, which mirrors the violence promoted by the highest state authorities.

Detention of the activist

An activist of the "Support to the People of Palestine" initiative was taken to the police for an informative interview, they announced on the initiative's Instagram page. The activist was detained for allegedly writing graffiti on the building of a company that exports arms to Israel, which has been carrying out a months-long offensive against Palestinians that has killed more than 30,000 civilians, mostly women and children. This is not the first time that activists of this initiative have faced pressure. The members announced at the beginning of May that the artist was also attacked by the police during his protest performance in which he pointed to the killing of children. We remind you that last year the police also banned a rally organized by "Support to the People of Palestine". The global trend of repression against pro-Palestinian activists is spreading, but in any case it represents an unacceptable form of violation of citizens' freedoms.