



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

May 31 - June 13, 2024

Freedom of Expression

Attacks on journalists during election day

Election day again passed with conflicts, this time also physical, and "the election process is far below the standards for democratic elections", CRTA announced. During this election day, several attacks on journalists were recorded. While he was filming activists of the ruling party, leaving the Novi Sad fair where the SNS call center was organized and from where unknown men took several boxes with certain materials, Danas journalist Uglješa Bokić was attacked. The video shows a young man who takes journalist' phone away from him and then punches him in the chest. Bokić was diagnosed with a bruised sternum. In front of the SNS headquarters in Zemun Polje, the editor of the Mašina.rs portal was attacked. The video shows a woman trying to take his phone, and then two men approach and start chasing the journalist. Both journalists filmed SNS activists due to suspicions that they were running parallel voter lists, which is prohibited. The attackers of the journalists were recorded, but whether they will be prosecuted is not certain given the reluctance of politically subordinate institutions to protect media workers.

Musician's performance banned due to public criticism

Folk music singer Milan Topalović Topalko was canceled from participating in the event in Topola, where he was supposed to be a member of the jury and perform. As the singer announced on his Instagram account, a person from the organization informed him that the president of the municipality of Topola "received a dispatch from Belgrade that Topalko is not allowed to sing." The singer was blacklisted by the authorities after criticizing Aleksandar Vučić. Then the president personally publicly called him out at the meeting of the ruling party, which showed that any kind of criticism, even by those who are not politicians, is absolutely unacceptable for SNS, especially if the criticism refers to Aleksandar Vučić. This kind of censorship prevents the singer from working, which is a basic human right. This case also shows how strong the pressure of the ruling regime is on all levels of government in the country, which was demonstrated by the example of local constituencies where the SNS lost on June 2 according to the first results, only for the result to change under suspicious circumstances after the election day.

The President of SVM insulted journalists

The Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (NDNV) strongly condemned the insults directed at journalists who report in Hungarian, which were directed by the president of the Union of Vojvodina Hungarians (SVM), Balint Pastor. Through social networks, Pastor accused journalists of "creating a desperate atmosphere in the community", all because of their coverage of the elections. NDNV warned that this is "a direct and unequivocal attack on the freedom of journalists and the media, whose basic role in society is to correct the authorities and represent the public's interest."

The man who threatened the newsroom was arrested

A 73-year-old man who, in April, threatened the members of the N1 newsroom that "they will be liquidated soon", was taken into custody. The Prosecution proposed to the court the imposition of a suspended sentence with a fixed prison sentence of one year, which will not be carried out if he does not repeat the criminal offense within three years of the finality of the verdict. Regardless of the fact that individuals who threaten are punished in a certain way, such threats will not stop happening as long as there is an atmosphere of violence, which is transmitted from the top of the government to all levels of society.

The police did not provide footage of the attack on the journalist

Not even two weeks after the physical attack on journalist Vuk Cvijić, the police did not submit the footage from the surrounding cameras to the prosecution. We remind you that Cvijić was attacked in the center of Belgrade by the director of the tabloid "Srpski telegraf" Milan Lađević. Although there are as many as 20 cameras in the vicinity of the attack site, the police did not submit any of the footage to the prosecutor's office, which ordered an investigation into the attack, thereby obstructing the investigation and punishment of the perpetrator, who is the owner of a pro-government tabloid. The President of the National Assembly, Ana Brnabić, relativized the whole case. She refused to explicitly condemn the attack on Cvijić, saying that it was an "attack by a journalist on a journalist".

Former policeman refuses to pay court costs

A former policeman, convicted for a physical attack on a journalist from Loznica that took place in 2005, refuses to pay court costs. Journalist Vladimir Mitrić has been living under police protection for 18 years because of the violence he experienced at the hands of their former colleague.

KRIK convicted on Koluvia's lawsuit

The Crime and Corruption Research Network (KRIK) was sentenced by the decision of the Court of Appeal in Belgrade for the alleged violation of the presumption of innocence of Predrag Koluvija. Koluvija sued KRIK because of the news from the trial in which he was called an "accused drug lord", although "the use of such expressions is a regular practice in well-known world media when writing about the accused leaders of drug cartels", stated Stevan Dojčinović, editor of KRIK. With this decision, the previous verdict of the High Court was confirmed. KRIK believes that it is about the so-called SLAPP lawsuits, aimed at pressuring the media not to cover certain topics. SLAPP lawsuits exhaust the material and non-material resources of journalists who freely report on topics of public interest. Such lawsuits make it impossible for the public to be timely and accurately informed. SLAPP lawsuits are a type of abuse of rights used by power holders in society with the main goal of intimidating individuals or organizations who point out various types of illegality that is occurring.

Freedom of Association

The trade union "Nezavisnost" in Krušik is under pressure

The branch union of metal workers "Nezavisnost" in the factory "Krušik" in Valjevo has lost its representativeness, for which it will complain to the board, announced Čedanka Andrić, the president of the union. This is a continuation of the pressure that the management of that factory has been exerting for months. The trade union states that their members were questioned in order to find out if they were really members of the trade union, then that they were blackmailed and that other methods of preventing their work were applied. During the union's media conference outside the factory, security guards were directing employees to another exit. It seems that the management of the factory is doing everything in their power to prevent free and independent trade union action, thereby directly violating the basic labor rights of the employees.

Arrested activists of the "SviĀe" group

Two activists of the informal youth group "SviĀe" were arrested in Novi Sad on election day, June 2. They were detained for three hours in the premises of the Security Information Agency for unknown reasons. This group of young people came into the public's focus because of their participation in the protests after the elections on December 17. Since then, their members have been regularly subjected to surveillance by the security services and repression by the police and other authorities.

Pressure on the workers of “Jura”

The management of the “Jura” factory from Leskovac, after the warning strikes of the Independent Union, began to put pressure on the employees to leave the union. In addition to the pressure to sign cards to leave the union, other pressures and intimidation were also applied to the workers. The workers were threatened that their bonuses would be taken away, that the factory would leave the country and that they would be fired. By the way, the union went on strike because of the poor working conditions in the factory, and their main demands are an increase in wages (which has been at the minimum for years), an increase in payment for meals, bonuses to act as a stimulus and to ensure basic hygienic conditions in the toilets. Regardless of the fact that the workers only demand the satisfaction of minimum labor rights, the management of the factory turned to repression and suppression of the basic labor right to union organization.

Lawsuit against the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation

Milan Radonjić, acquitted of the murder of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija, sued the Slavko Ćuruvija foundation for injury to reputation and honor and demanded compensation of half a million dinars. The foundation was sued for a statement in which it disagreed with that ruling. "This lawsuit is a continuation of the persecution of Slavko Ćuruvija even 25 years after the murder, and it is a consequence of the general atmosphere created by the government in this society, which is impunity for crimes," said Ivana Stevanović from the Foundation. Even though the statement for which Radonjić sued the foundation does not mention him by name, the former head of the Belgrade center of the State Security Department decided to sue the foundation that preserves the memory of the murdered journalist. We remind you that on February 2, the Appellate Court in Belgrade acquitted four former members of the State Security of the charges of participation in the murder of journalists. The elucidation of the brutal murder of a journalist, which has been going on for a quarter of a century, was brought back to the beginning with this decision, which clearly shows the lack of interest of the state authorities to solve this case and to punish those responsible for the murder.