



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

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Freedom of Expression

The owner of KTV is again targeted by the police

Danijel Radić, the owner of Zrenjanin KTV, is still under pressure from the police. A video of the police testing Radić for the presence of narcotics was published on social media. This is the third time the journalist has been tested in the past few months, although the results were never positive. Last year, Radić was also exposed to pressure from the local police, while during one stop the policeman told him that "they received an order and to be careful until the election because this is a private state and private police." Last month, against the editor-in-chief of KTV and other persons, the Minister of Information and the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) launched a procedure to determine the possible existence of liability due to the broadcasting of media content, i.e. due to the guest appearance of the journalist Srđan Škoro, whose statements the media close to the government interpreted as threats to the president and his family. The pressure to which KTV is exposed points to the threat to freedom of media and expression in Serbia, which particularly affects smaller, local media.

Brnabić targets the media and journalist associations

The President of the National Assembly, Ana Brnabić, continues to target independent media and journalist associations, accusing them of "creating chaos". The attack on independent and professional media comes as the authorities are dissatisfied with their coverage of environmental protests and the problem of lithium mining. Heavy accusations against the media come a week after the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia (IJAS) announced that since the beginning of the year, 84 attacks on journalists have been recorded in our country. "It is noticeable that the campaigns run by the regime's media and (non)governmental organizations in synergy with government officials are more intense," IJAS announced.

Activists detained for holding banners

Three activists of the “Kreni-promeni” movement were detained because they unfurled a banner reading “you will not dig” at the athletes’ reception in front of the City Assembly. As the reason for arresting the activists, the police stated that it was done because they were holding a banner that was not in accordance with the event. However, the real reason is that the government is trying in every possible way to stifle critical voices opposing lithium mining in Serbia. Apprehension because of a banner is a stifling of freedom of expression and is a continuation of the repression that is carried out against citizens.

Death threats over text

Aleksandar Matković, an associate at the Institute of Economic Sciences in Belgrade, received several death threats after the article about lithium that he wrote for the Danas portal was published. For days now, those who oppose lithium mining have been the target of harassment. In addition to them, those who only report on the protests against Rio Tinto suffer pressure from the highest level of government. Thus, international journalistic associations spoke out and called on President Vučić and the authorities in Serbia to refrain from “this blatant pattern of harassment of journalists and the media for critical reporting”.

Fredoom of Association

Prolonged custody of Novica Antić

Novica Antić, the former president of the Military Union of Serbia (VSS), as well as Predrag Jevtić, the former general secretary of the union, have had their detention extended for 6 months. Antić and Jevtić are charged with embezzlement of money belonging to the union, and have been in custody since the end of February, while the defendants’ attorneys claim that it is a matter of political persecution of unfit union leaders. In the period since the former union leaders were arrested, there has been “the breaking up of this until then representative union, which has been reduced from the former 7,500 members to a statistical error”, states Antić in an open letter.

Pressures on young environmental activists

On the same day, two young activists were detained for informational interviews in the police stations after giving speeches at environmental protests. The activist of the "SviČe" group, Ivan Bjelić, was detained by the police in Gornji Milanovac, where he first came to give a statement because he was verbally attacked by a man at the protest. After giving the statement, Bjelić was detained at the police station because, as they informed him, a search warrant was issued for him due to a post on Instagram in which he "informed people that the Constitutional Court declared the government's decree on stopping the Jadar project unconstitutional." The activist was released from the police after an hour and a half. In Novi Sad, inspectors took the activist of the "Stav" group, Branislav Đorđević, to an informative interview, a day after he spoke at a protest against the opening of a lithium mine by Rio Tinto. Other public authorities also exerted pressure on young activists. Thus, an inspection was sent to the address of the company of Nikola Ristić, an activist of the "SviČe" group. Ristić was previously the target of a smear tabloid campaign. It is particularly worrisome that the highest state officials are involved in the targeting, such as Serbian Prime Minister Miloš Vučević who insulted Mila Pajić, an activist of the "Stav" group, in a post on the X platform, accusing her of working to "destroy the state" and "bringing out the worst at the expense of the Serbian people and our fatherland". This kind of language of bullies most directly threatens the safety of the student, who was repeatedly exposed to physical attacks due to her activism. Prime Minister Vučević, as a public official, must bear responsibility for the words he utters in public, with which he draws a target on a young activist. All these attacks come at a time when protests against lithium mining are taking place throughout Serbia, and the only goal of these pressures is to discourage citizens who are taking to the streets in huge numbers. Citizens who are otherwise apolitical are increasingly taking part in the protests against Rio Tinto, which shows the importance of the topic of public health and protection of the environment, which has triggered an avalanche and greater engagement of people in socio-political life.

Fredoom of Assembly

Arrests after protests against Rio Tinto

On Saturday, August 10, a protest rally was held in Belgrade against the intention to mine lithium in the Jadar valley. The rally was organized by the Alliance of Environmental Organizations of Serbia, as the climax of the rallies that have been held across the country for weeks against the Rio Tinto company and against the decision to cancel the decree of the Government of Serbia banning lithium mining. Days before the protest, the activists were exposed to a campaign of spreading disinformation and lies by high-ranking government officials. On the day of the protest, activists of the "Ne damo Jadar" association, Zlatko Kokanović and Nebojša Petković, were invited to an informational interview at the Security Information Agency, where they were warned that they would bear the consequences in case of blockades. The day after the protest, three young activists were arrested, not because of the blockades, but because of the alleged attack on an employee of the pro-regime media "Informer". Namely, during the blockade of the Prokop Railway Station, the crowd booed an employee of "Informer" who was recording the protest.

Young activists placed banners and a sandwich in front of her, which she tried to remove. Although it is possible to see what really happened on the video, the prosecutor's office quickly condemned the activists for the crime of "insulting and attacking a journalist", although it is obvious that she is the one who physically attacked them. The activists were sentenced to prison sentences: Ivan Bjelić to 40 days, and Nikola Ristić and Jevđenije Julijan Dimitrijević to 30 days. The activists were taken to prison on the same day, but after strong public pressure, they were released on Tuesday, August 13, when the verdict was overturned. The prison terms for the alleged attack are only the result of a days-long campaign against environmental activists. Their arrest and imprisonment is an attempt to intimidate and discourage citizens from further participating in protests. Unlike the activists, the person who drove his car into the gathered citizens at the protest, seriously injuring one man and two other people, has not yet been identified. Days after the protest in Belgrade, environmental activists from all over Serbia were invited to informative talks. Branko Ivković was interrogated by the police in Valjevo, where he was accused of causing panic and disorder. Dragan Simović from Srednja Dobrinja was also questioned due to his participation in the protest of environmental organizations. The speaker from the protest in Užice was detained for 30 days. The police minister announced criminal charges against the participants of the blockades, the prime minister called the protesters a "disbanded gang", and the construction minister "hooligans". A huge number of people who are interested in this topic and took to the streets to oppose the Rio Tinto project obviously worried the government, which decided to deal with political opponents by all means, and the arrests and detentions are aimed only at intimidation and suppression of further forms rebellion. The arrest of activists is an attack on all citizens of Serbia and on basic freedoms in our country, and they are a reflection of an authoritarian regime that does not hesitate to use increasingly repressive methods.