



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

September 13 - September 26, 2024

Freedom of Expression

Death threats to the scientist again

Aleksandar Matković, scientific associate of the Economic Institute, continues to receive death threats after the column on lithium he wrote for the daily newspaper Danas. The threats multiplied after his name appeared on the list of "environmental terrorists" drawn up by the phantom association Kopaćemo. The last in a series of threats arrived at the beginning of September. Matković says that he has received over 30 threats so far, and still no one was held accountable for endangering the safety of this scientist.

Threats to journalist of Bujanovačke

An unknown person threatened journalist of Bujanovačke Nikola Stevanović on Facebook. The Independent Journalists Association of Serbia (IJAS) announced that "competent institutions are still not doing enough to create a safe environment for journalists to work, and impunity for threats and rejection of reports can only encourage further action by those who want to silence journalists." They add that the threats are the result of a campaign against journalists who criticize the government. Such campaigns have become more and more dangerous in Serbia in recent years, and they are started by the highest officials of the government, and then pro-regime tabloids and media also continue an organized smear campaign. Such campaigns encourage unknown persons to threaten, and often attack, all those who are targeted by the authorities.

Targeting of Kurir journalist

On the social media of the "Diabetes Revolucija", photos of Kurir journalist Jelena S. Spasić with a disputed description were published. From "Diabetes revolucija" they are dissatisfied with this tabloid's reporting on medicines for people with diabetes, which they claim is incorrect. If the reporting of this tabloid is not true and based on facts, legal mechanisms of reaction should be used, without directly endangering journalists.

Part of the lawsuit against Vidojković was adopted

Part of the lawsuit filed by Mayor Aleksandar Šapić against journalist and writer Marko Vidojković was adopted by the court's decision. Šapić sued Vidojković several times, and this lawsuit refers to an Vidojković's text published on the Buka portal, which Šapić claims caused him mental pain. However, the court accepted the part of the claim related to damage to business reputation, and the defendant was ordered to pay a fine of 70,000 dinars, while the claim related to disturbed peace of mind, damage to reputation and honor was rejected. This is another in a series of disputes that the mayor of Belgrade is conducting against journalists and media who write about his work and affairs. The way Šapić has chosen to respond is through SLAPP lawsuits aimed at preventing critical reporting on his activities as a public official.

Fredoom of Assembly

Verdict against the activist

The misdemeanor court fined activist Isidora Čeketić from Novi Sad for allegedly insulting an official. The verdict refers to the protests against deforestation in Šodroš in 2022, when there were several clashes between the police and citizens. The policewoman who blamed the activist for the insult did not appear in court even once. Also, the fact that the policewoman caused minor physical injuries to the activist, as shown by the medical findings, was also not taken into account. This is the second verdict against activists in Novi Sad passed in the past month, which punishes participants of various protests, which sends a clear message that public expression of opinion and participation in protest actions is punishable.

Interrupted meeting of an informal group of citizens

Several people tried to interrupt the meeting of the informal group "Mirijevo - green and healthy". A group of citizens gathered to discuss the Detailed Regulation Plan, which envisages the cutting of 66 hectares of forest for the construction of residential and commercial buildings. People who introduced themselves as the owners of the plots where the logging was planned, tried to break up the meeting, and in the end the police had to react.

Fredoom of Association

A group of foreign citizens broke into the premises of the Krokodil Association

A group of men broke into the premises of the Krokodil Association on September 20, and on that occasion they took down the flag of Ukraine that was hung on the terrace of the association's premises. Two weeks earlier, two Russian citizens, who removed the Ukrainian flag, also removed the Palestinian flag from the Crocodile Center. This latest break-in happened while the association's employees were in the offices. After the intrusion of the hooligans, the employees called the police, whose officers did not even make a report of the unfortunate event. Who can activists and journalists turn to if the police do not protect them? In whose interest do they work and who do they protect - vulnerable citizens or hooligans? Intrusion into the premises during working hours, in addition to preventing the work and activities of the association, is also a direct threat to the safety of employees in the civil sector - a sector which in Serbia is exposed to constant intimidation and which operates under increasingly difficult conditions of constant narrowing of basic civil liberties.

Hooligans attacked students

Students from the group STAV (Students Against Authoritarian Government) were attacked in front of the Rectorate in Novi Sad, when a group of about thirty masked men threw an unidentified explosive device at the students, and then directly attacked them physically. Students Mila Pajić and Srđan Đurić were injured in the attack. Young people from the STAV group were in front of the Rectorate building with the intention of preventing the vote for the student parliament, which, contrary to the rules of the Faculty of Philosophy, is being held at the Rectorate for the 6th time. There is only one list on the ballot, whose members are employees of the Assembly of Vojvodina. After the attack on the students, the masked men locked themselves in the Rector's building, where they were allegedly securing a conference that was not actually happening at that moment. It turns out that they actually provide passage for those who went out to vote illegitimately. The Rector of the University of Novi Sad did not comment on whether he hired private security. The police did not identify the masked men who attacked students, but they did identify the students who are defending the autonomy of the Faculty of Philosophy. A day after the violent behavior of the hooligans, the prosecutor's office launched an investigation, and the students announced that they would file a criminal complaint against Ognjen Dopud, who is the director of the European Affairs Fund of Vojvodina and who is engaged in several other provincial bodies, and who turned out to be the leader the group that attacked the representatives of STAV. The amount of violence that is carried out and goes unpunished in society is an indication of a serious lack of institutional accountability. In the previous weeks, news came from Novi Sad about the fines of activists who participated in protests against violence and against deforestation last year, now young activists are directly attacked with explosive devices, and the authorities persistently refuse to prosecute those who actually break the law. Everyone who thinks freely and expresses their views publicly has become a target.