



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

November 8 - November 21, 2024

Freedom of Expression

SNS councilor punched a journalist

While the journalist of the Kovinske info portal was waiting for the answer of the president of the Kovin Municipality Assembly, SNS councilor Dragan Šljivovački hit him from behind. After that, he twisted his arm and tried to steal his phone, which was used to record the session of the Assembly. In Kovinske info, they interpret this move as an attempt to intimidate journalists and demand a reaction from the prosecutor's office and sanctioning of councilors. From violent rhetoric at press conferences to direct physical attacks, representatives of the ruling party increasingly threaten the integrity and safety of journalists without any consequences.

A case was established due to the attack on television crews

After the attack on the N1 and Euronews cameraman during the protest in Novi Sad, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office opened a case and contacted the injured parties to give a statement. We remind you that at the protest in Novi Sad regarding the tragic death of 15 people in the fall of the canopy at the Railway Station, unknown men attacked the cameramen of two television stations, and several attacks were also recorded on N1 reporters who were reporting from the event.

Retired policeman sentenced for endangering journalists

The basic court in Loznica convicted former police officer Dragić Filipović for endangering the safety of Večernje novosti correspondent Vladimir Mitrić. Filipović was sentenced to a suspended prison sentence and a ban on approaching the journalist was imposed on him. The journalist was the victim of a physical attack 18 years ago, and last year a retired police officer threatened him that the attack would happen again. The case of a police officer who threatens a journalist does not encourage others who are engaged in the journalistic profession to report to the authorities all the threats and pressures they are exposed to.

Freedom of Assembly

New arrests of activists in Novi Sad

After the protest in Novi Sad on November 5, when citizens demanded the punishment of those responsible for the fall of the canopy of the Railway station in Novi Sad when 15 people died, the activist groups SviČe and STAV called for a six-hour blockade on the Varadin bridge. Before the beginning of the protest, activists Mila Pajić and Doroteja Antić were detained. They were approached by six men, who later turned out to be plainclothes policemen. The activists did not accept to go with them because they did not see the police markings and the numbers on their badges, which was followed by the aggressive reaction of the policemen, who took the activists to a black car without plates and other markings. Activists described this behavior as kidnapping because the two students did not know who was taking them and where. On the same day, Miran Pogačar was detained again by members of the Security Information Agency, also just before the beginning of the blockade. Some activists detained on November 5 and in the days after are still in detention. Activist Ivan Blejić was sentenced to 30 days in custody. His lawyer filed an appeal against the decision, but the judge for the preliminary proceedings decided that Bjelić should remain in custody. In addition to Bjelić, four other men are in custody for the same crime they are suspected of. There are currently 9 people in custody, among them Goran Ješić and Miša Bačulov. Ješić decided to turn himself in, while Bačulov was taken by police into custody from his home. The pressure continued on the farmer Đoka Čurčić, who at the first protest brought the tank from which the liquid was spilled onto the Town Hall. His property was visited by two inspections. The Initiative for the Survival of Serbian Farmers announced that this was a form of repression for participating in a civil protest. Nikola Končarević, who was fined 25,000 dinars for disturbing public order and peace, and Bojan Terzić, a member of the Solidarnost platform, who stated that he spent 20 hours in solitary confinement on charges of destroying and damaging other people's property, were released from custody. The young man who defended the girl from plainclothes policemen, Relja Stanojević, had his detention extended for assaulting an official, although he could not have known that it was the policemen because they did not identify themselves. The protests are taking place because citizens are demanding responsibility for the demolition of the canopy in which 15 people died. The Prosecutor's Office ordered the arrest of the suspects in this case only after 20 days, but the authorities were therefore quick to detain the activists who only demand the responsibility of the authorities. Due to the accident in Novi Sad and the repression against activists, opposition MPs and councilors blocked the court and the prosecutor's office in Novi Sad for several days. Every day there were recorded clashes with the police in full gear securing the institutions. On that occasion, the MPs were pushed, and some of them felt ill. One deputy was arrested, and a criminal complaint was filed against him for assaulting an official. On the occasion of all the pressures on citizens and activists, a group of organizations issued a joint statement demanding the release of political prisoners.

Police legitimized citizens in front of Hotel Jugoslavija

The police legitimized the citizens who gathered as a sign of opposition to the demolition of Hotel Jugoslavija. In the previous period, the citizens addressed the authorities with objections to the demolition of this historically important building, but since all objections were routinely rejected, they decided to protest. Citizens point to doubts about the illegal method of demolishing the building, which can release a large amount of harmful asbestos. From the "Odbranimo Jugu" initiative, they state that at one meeting there was an altercation with a truck driver, after which the police responded and legitimized the citizens. The company Millennium Team, which became the owner of the hotel, points out that the planned demolition in no way endangers the safety and health of the residents of Novi Belgrade and Zemun, and in the statement they also state that the dissemination of information about the existence of dangerous substances is aimed at causing panic and disorder and as such is subject to criminal liability. The Millennium Team hereby threatens all those who protest, and in their history they have a whole series of SLAPP lawsuits that they initiated against journalists and the media.

Criminal charges and invitations to informational interviews due to protests

After the protest in Valjevo, where the gathered citizens threw eggs at the premises of the Euro lithium Balkan company, the company stated that it would file a criminal complaint against Branko Ivković from the Valjevo resistance movement organization. Citizens protested against lithium and boron mining. Ivković also announced at the press conference that several participants of the protest were invited to the police for informational interviews. The trend of pressure on activists, which started this year at environmental protests against lithium mining, continues, and now citizens are invited to informational talks in case of participation in any protest. The detention aims to intimidate and stifle any form of civil activism.

Arrests at the protest for the defense of the bridge

For weeks, a group of citizens have been camping and on duty at the approaches to the Old Sava Bridge in Belgrade, trying to prevent its announced dismantling and demolition. At a time when blockades and clashes with the police are taking place in Novi Sad, the authorities in Belgrade have decided to proceed with the controversial demolition of the bridge. During the night, the police appeared with shields and in full gear. They put up concrete barricades and closed both sides of the bridge. Activist groups called on citizens to join the protest and prevent the start of dismantling. Some opposition politicians also joined the protest, and two of them, members of the Kreni-promeni movement, were knocked to the ground and dragged by the police, and were forcibly carried away during their arrest. During the day, four students who participated in the blockade were arrested and they were released from the police after a few hours. The reason for their detention is not clear. The closure of institutions for citizens and the complete absence of any consultative processes with experts and citizens leads to protests and civil disobedience as the only option for the citizens' voice to be heard.

The student was detained in front of the Rectorate

Pavle Cicvarić, a student and member of the Borba group, was detained when he tried to enter the Rectorate of the University of Belgrade. A group of students gathered to attend the Students' Day celebration. It was announced that Aleksandar Vučić will also attend the event, so they invited young people from Borba to express their dissatisfaction with the situation in the country. However, the visit was canceled due to an meeting of the National Security Council. The gathered students could not enter the Rectorate building because their names were not on a special list. Two policemen asked Cicvarić to show his ID, after which a third policeman appeared and insisted on showing him his identity card as well. On that occasion, the policeman twisted the student's arm. He spent about an hour at the police station, after which he rejoined the gathering in front of the Rectorate. The behavior of police officers towards activists is becoming more and more extreme day by day, and instead of protecting citizens, they are increasingly acting in the interests of the ruling party.

Freedom of Association

Destruction of activists' property

The activist of the SviČe group, Nikola Ristić, had the rear windshield of his car, which was parked in his parents' neighborhood, broken. This action took place before the six-hour blockade in Novi Sad organized by the SviČe and STAV groups. The window of the apartment of Local Front activist Predrag Voštinić was hit and broken a few days earlier. Both cases were reported to the police, but the police told Voštinić to wait to see if something similar would happen again. It is not clear until what moment the activists should wait and what exactly they should wait for to happen to them in order for the authorities to react. As a reminder, back in June of this year, it was noticed that members of the secret services were filming and following Voštinić. The attacks to which the activists are exposed are orchestrated by the authorities and pro-regime tabloids, who, in the absence of verbal arguments, turn to violence against political dissenters.