
THREE FREEDOMS UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS



Civic
Initiatives

freedom of expression

freedom of assembly

freedom of association

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

January 17 - January 30, 2025

Freedom of Expression

Threats and pressures on students, educators and other employees

In addition to physical attacks, which government representatives justify and encourage with their rhetoric, institutional mechanisms are also used in order to prevent the further spread of blockades and strikes and citizen protests against corruption. One method is intimidation. Thus, the student of the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad was warned by an acquaintance, who is now employed at the Security and Information Agency, not to come to the protest organized in front of this institution, so that she would not be legitimized or detained. A worker of the Kolubara mining basin was arrested because of a Facebook status in which he called on his colleagues to stop work. Also because of Facebook comments, police inspectors came to the property of a farmer and questioned him for allegedly "causing general danger". The commissioner of the EPS union "Nezavisnost" as well as one of the leaders of the work body "Jedinstvo Kolubara" received a warning before dismissal. Two workers spoke at the EPS employee protest and openly supported the student demands. Professors, teachers and students are dominantly exposed to pressure. The threats of an inspection announced by the outgoing Prime Minister Miloš Vučević and the Minister of Education Slavica Đukić Dejanović have come true. The inspection has so far visited as many as 83 schools, and disciplinary proceedings have been initiated against dozens of educators. The Minister of Education also sent a letter to schools ordering a reduction in the wages of those on strike. The police stopped the educators who came to the protest in Belgrade on the road and prevented them from coming, which directly violated their freedom of movement and assembly, as well as the legally guaranteed rights related to the strike. Several people came to the Seventh Belgrade High School, where classes were suspended, who introduced themselves as employees of the Zvezdara Municipality and who announced that they had come to talk to the director about why there are no classes in the school. This is obviously another attempt to intimidate teachers in schools. A man who introduced himself as a parent entered the hall of the elementary school in Belgrade and started threatening the teachers that he would kill them. Threats were also received on the teachers' private phones, and teachers and students are continuously the target of tabloid harassment. In addition to the media, attacks and targeting also come from officials, so the mayor of Zaječar, Boško Ničić, insulted and attacked a student on his Facebook profile. Nevertheless, these pressures still did not shake the citizens' intentions to fight against corruption and to demand responsibility for the death of 15 people in Novi Sad.

Jelena Tanasković sued KRIK

Jelena Tanasković, former Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and former acting the general director of the "Infrastruktura Železnice Srbije" joint-stock company, suspected in the case of the fall of the canopy in Novi Sad, sued KRIK for violation of honor and reputation and violation of the presumption of innocence and demands that she be paid one million dinars. Tanasković sued KRIK because of an article in which journalists reveal that her former employer filed a criminal complaint against her on suspicion of financial crime, and that the complaint was dismissed after a report by the police department led by Ninoslav Cmolić, the husband of Tanasković's friend and minister Irena Vujović. KRIK claims that Tanasković states things in the lawsuit that are not written anywhere in the text. This is the 18th lawsuit against this research portal, and such a large number of lawsuits with SLAPP characteristics make the work of the newsroom impossible and thus prevents free, investigative journalism.

The police pushed the journalists

While members of the intervention police were evicting opposition politicians from the City Hall in Novi Sad, journalists were also evicted. "Radio 021 journalist Dragana Prica and her colleague Ksenija Pavkov from N1 television were physically dragged by the arms and shoulders by the police and pushed towards the exit, despite the fact that both of them had presented themselves with identification multiple times," announced the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina. The job of journalists is to report on events from the scene, and no one, not even the police, should interfere with that.

Death threats to the newsroom

Death threats were sent to the editors of the Magločistač portal via social networks. In order to preserve the safety of journalists and enable their work, it is necessary for the competent authorities to react in such situations and punish the perpetrators, which unfortunately rarely happens.

The cameraman was forbidden to enter the Temple of St. Sava

Security of the Temple of St. Sava forbade FoNet's cameraman to film the evening service before the school celebration. Preventing media workers from performing their work directly threatens the public interest and citizens' right to information.

Minister Mali took away the journalist's phone

After being booed in a Belgrade restaurant, Finance Minister Siniša Mali violently took the phone of a journalist who happened to be on the spot and who wanted to hear his comment on the chanting of the guests of the restaurant. Such arrogant behavior of the highest state official towards a journalist is an indicator of the general attitude of the government towards the media and is an unacceptable act of violence that then spreads further in society.

Freedom of Assembly

Attacks on students

Two more female students were seriously injured in the previous period. During the student blockade in New Belgrade during the General Strike on January 24, a woman drove a car and hit a group of stewards. One of the female students who was a steward on that occasion hit her head on the curb and suffered neurosurgical head injuries, epidural hematoma, skull bone fracture and brain contusion. This is the second serious case of female students being injured in car crashes into blockade participants. The woman who was driving the car was detained for up to 30 days. In Novi Sad, on the night between January 27 and 28, two groups of students were attacked, and one of the students ended up in the Clinical Center of Vojvodina with serious injuries. First, two men attacked a male and female student who were pasting stickers on a trash can located in front of the premises of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). On that occasion, two men came out of the SNS offices and physically assaulted a male and female student. When the students managed to get out and start to run away, the men came out with batons and got into a car in which they chased them around the city. The same two men with the help of two other men then attacked another group of students in front of a school and on that occasion they used baseball bats to lightly injure one male student, while a female student was seriously injured. The men hit her on the head and legs with baseball bats, her jaw is dislocated and she has injuries all over her body. All this happened after the address of Aleksandar Vučić, who declaratively called for dialogue and conversation, while only a few hours later thugs came out of the premises of SNS and beat young people. Novi Sad police announced that they detained four men suspected of participating in the attack. Within just two weeks, other violent attacks on students in the blockades were recorded. An elderly man attacked a student of the Faculty of Medicine in Novi Sad with a knife. Fortunately, the students stopped him and no one was hurt. A young man drew offensive graffiti on the building of the College of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science in Belgrade and on that occasion bit the porter and hit a student. A man with a knife in his hand was tearing student banners in front of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. A day later, another man physically assaulted a student of the Faculty of Law in Novi Sad. Students who attended the celebration of St. Sava's Day in the premises of Matica Srpska in Novi Sad and who wanted to read a poem in front of those present, were attacked by men in black who were assumed to be members of security. However, a day later, the Presidency of Matica Srpska announced that those who expelled the students and on that occasion strangled one student were not the security of this institution. A campaign followed in the regime media in which the students were presented as those who "desecrate the holy day" and spread "anti-Serbism", which is part of the already seen nationalist and chauvinist propaganda of the ruling regime.

Incidents at roadblocks

The number of attacks on blockade participants is increasing daily. The Center for Investigative Journalism of Serbia (CINS) created an interactive map for easier recording of all incidents. Nevertheless, in spite of all the attacks on the participants of the blockades that took place, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade announced that only eight criminal proceedings were being conducted for crimes carried out during student blockades and protests in the previous period. In the previous two weeks, the following incidents were recorded: a driver tried to pass through the gathered citizens in front of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade; in front of the Faculty of Law in Novi Sad, a driver injured a retired journalist, and in the same city, four days later, another man drove his car into a crowd. The same thing happened in Belgrade on the day of the General Strike, when a man tried to break through the blockade on Trošarina. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured in these incidents. In two cases, citizens who tried to take down the middle finger banners were attacked. The banners are the Serbian Progressive Party's response to the bloody hand banners used by protesting citizens. Activists tried to remove these vulgar SNS posters from locations on the Blue Bridge and Mostar intersection, and on that occasion they were attacked by men who were guarding the indecent SNS banner. However, this was not the end of the pressure on the activists. After the activists took down the obscene banner from the Mostar intersection, the traffic police stopped them and temporarily confiscated their vehicle. Unfortunately, the saddest incident happened in Novi Sad during the protest General Strike on January 24. During the passage of the ambulance, the driver ran over the city dog Dona, who died afterwards.

Attacks on students at roadblocks

Even the high school students participating in the fifteen-minute commemorative blockades were not spared from physical attacks. Namely, in New Belgrade, a man jumped out of the window of his apartment and first attacked the students and professors of the Graphic Media School with a batons and then with a knife. The MUP announced to the cashier that day that the man had been arrested. During the street blockade at the corner of Ustanička and Grčić Milenko Street, a man tried to drive a car through the gathered students of the Eighth Belgrade High School. The driver then got out of the car, cursed the students and the N1 cameraman. The man was also taken into custody later. Nevertheless, both of these acts indicate how much the representatives of the authorities in their public appearances, and with the help of pro-regime media, normalized violence towards those who protest and thus directly threatened the safety of the youngest participants in the blockades.

Freedom of Association

Expulsion of foreign citizens

As many as 13 participants from non-governmental organizations, who took part in the Erste Stiftung workshop held in Belgrade, were detained late in the evening by plainclothes policemen on January 21. They were taken to the police, they were interrogated until the early hours of the morning, and then they were handed a document in Cyrillic that the participants did not understand and had to sign. Thus, 13 citizens from Croatia, Slovenia, North Macedonia, Albania, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Moldova and Austria were declared a "security risk for Serbia" and were banned from entering the country for a year. Zagreb sent a note of protest to Serbia over the deportation of Croatian women, and Albania and Romania demanded an explanation from the authorities in Serbia for the expulsion of their citizens. In the statement of a group of CSOs from Serbia, it is stated that: "The cowardly, illegal and vile treatment of colleagues from the civil sector from countries in our neighborhood is a dangerous attempt to strengthen the narrative about foreign agents, mercenaries and secret services whose intention is to intimidate the citizens of Serbia." The expulsion comes at a time when the government is trying to present legitimate student protests as an attempt to interfere with foreign factors in the country's internal affairs, and this kind of narrative is part of a wider decades-long presentation of the civil sector as an enemy. It is also a continuation of the pressure that the country's secret services are exerting on local and regional activists.

Activist attacked

Activist of the Bravo movement, Zoran Đurković, was attacked in Kula by several thugs and suffered serious injuries. He was attacked while putting up posters against violence. Impunity for similar attacks in the past does not raise hope that this case will be solved. Civic activists are seriously threatened in Serbia, and no one protects their safety.