



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

January 31 - February 13, 2025

Freedom of Expression

Disciplinary proceedings due to statements

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia initiated disciplinary proceedings against the police officer Katarina Petrović because of the statements she made last year during two shows on N1 television. In her statements, Petrović pointed to the inadequate behavior of the police, who are "an instrument in the hands of the authorities." The Ministry of Internal Affairs announced that such statements potentially damage the reputation of the police, although according to a 2022 survey by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, only 32.2% of respondents have full confidence in the police. This is a new disciplinary procedure against the policewoman, who was already prosecuted for publishing information about a traffic violation in which the close friend of the president of the state participated and for which she has already been suspended for 19 months.

Attacks on journalists

Reporters Without Borders condemned the violence against journalists in Serbia, which was "carried out by the police and supporters of President Vučić during anti-corruption protests". In just three months, at least twelve journalists were attacked, they announced. "At the same time, the security forces and members of the president's party are trying to obstruct the coverage of the protests by all means, including physical violence, insults and other tactics that make it difficult for journalists, who are sometimes forced to flee for their own safety." In a letter from the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office to the Platform of the Council of Europe for the Protection of Journalism, it was stated that criminal and misdemeanor proceedings were initiated due to the attack on the N1 and Euronews teams during the protest in Novi Sad on November 5, when there was a conflict between the police and a group of men. In the future, we expect to see whether the proceedings will be concluded with appropriate punishments for those who endanger journalists and obstruct free reporting, but significant change is not expected until government representatives stop the practice of targeting free and independent media.

Threats and Pressure on Students, Parents, and Employees

Students, their parents and professors and citizens who support them are exposed to threats and pressure from various sides. The institutional pressures they are subjected to are a clear attempt to stifle freedom of expression and discourage further activism. Numerous threats and insults were recorded on social networks against students who walked from Belgrade to Novi Sad, ahead of the protest "1.2. on 3 bridges" on the occasion of marking three months since the fall of the canopy. Before the protest in Kraljevo on January 30, some parents of students received phone calls from an unknown person who questioned them about the reasons for their children's participation in the protest. The students of the High School in Raška made the decision at the plenum held on Saturday to enter the blockade. However, during the plenum, the deputy mayor and another clerk secretly filmed the children. The fact that local officials are secretly filming high school students and endangering their safety in this way is extremely worrying. High school students are increasingly exposed to pressures and threats. In Leskovac, a group of five unidentified men interrogated students who were on strike at the Trade and Hospitality School. They introduced themselves as members of the Ministry of the Interior, but the police claim that these were not their inspectors. They came to the school due to two allegedly broken toilet tanks in the women's restrooms. Students suspect that the whole situation was staged and that the real intention was to break the student blockade. In addition to the children, representatives of institutions are also attempting to discourage young people from expressing their opinions publicly by pressuring their parents. The mother of one of the students, Biljana Šebek, suspects that she was removed from her position as director in the Directorate for Construction Land and transferred to a lower position in another sector because of her son Pavle Šebek's participation in the protests and blockades. Pavle was a student at the Faculty of Law and had been beaten. At the primary school "Vasa Stajić" in Novi Sad, during the Parent Council meeting, two men who were not members of the Council arrived uninvited, and the parent who got into an argument with them was later called in for questioning by the police. All employees who publicly support student demands are facing direct pressure at their workplaces, which is an attack on their basic livelihood. Tatjana Jevtović Stoimenov, a professor at the Medical Faculty in Niš, was expelled from the Laboratory for Medical Genetics, in which she personally participated in the founding. Two history professors at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš lost their places on the organizing committee of an important scientific symposium in the city because they supported students in the blockade and protests. Due to public pressure, the professors were reinstated in the organizing committee. Dragoslav Ljubičić, the union representative of EPS Nezavisnost, got fired from the TENT branch, which came two weeks after a warning prior to dismissal. In recent weeks, Ljubičić has been under pressure from the management for openly supporting students and speaking at one of the EPS workers' protests.

Tanasković sued KRIK again

Jelena Tanasković, former acting general director of the "Infrastruktura železnice Srbije" and a suspect in the case of the fall of the canopy in Novi Sad, again sued KRIK. This time she sued them for publishing the text about the first lawsuit she filed against the research portal. Tanasković filed two lawsuits within a month while she is suspect in the case of the fall of the canopy in Novi Sad when 15 people died. "This move clearly shows that Tanasković is conducting SLAPP proceedings against us, that is, he wants to overwhelm us with lawsuits so that we stop writing about her," said KRIK editor Stevan Dojčinović.

A man threatened Nenad Kulačin

An elderly man approached Nenad Kulačin on the street in Šabac, first verbally attacked him and then tried to hit him. The journalist and author of the show "Dobar, loš, zao" is regularly the target of death threats, and on one occasion his mother was also attacked on the street. Journalists in Serbia who perform their work professionally are targeted as political opponents of the regime, which directly calls their safety into question, and the conditions in which they work have worsened significantly in recent years.

Freedom of Assembly

Attacks on students

Despite highlighting all previous physical attacks on students and citizens, incidents during the fifteen-minute blockades, which are being held to honor the victims of the roof collapse at the Novi Sad Railway Station, continue. In the Belgrade neighborhood of Karaburma, bricks were thrown at the gathered citizens from the window of a nearby building. Fortunately, there were no injuries in the incident. A few days later, in the same neighborhood, during a peaceful protest march, firecrackers were thrown at the citizens. In front of the Institute for Mental Health in Belgrade, a driver hit two doctors at full speed. They sustained minor injuries, but the fact that cars continue to drive through gatherings highlights the need for better police protection at public events. The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade announced that the driver was detained for up to 48 hours due to suspicion of attempting to commit a serious murder. This was not the only car-related incident recorded in the previous period. In Sremski Karlovci, a driver tried to pass through the gathered citizens who were welcoming students from Belgrade. In Novi Sad, in front of the "Bogdan Šuput" Design School, a man tried to drive his car through a group of students. At another location in Novi Sad, another driver hit a person who was standing on the access road. Again, in Novi Sad, an elderly couple tried to break through a blockade, after which they began verbally attacking the gathered citizens. In Belgrade, a man attempted to break through a blockade at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences in the same manner as the previously mentioned incidents, but citizens stood in front of the car, preventing him from doing this. The man driving the car was identified and detained by the police, who were securing the blockade. In Bečej, a driver accelerated towards high school students who were organizing a blockade at an intersection in the city. On February 7, the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš, Natalija Jovanović, was verbally and physically attacked during a student and citizens' protest. An elderly woman physically assaulted the dean, shouting "we'll kill you" and "you'll pay for everything." Dean Jovanović has gained wider public attention in recent months due to her support for the students.

Freedom of Association

Abuse of the Law in order to target activists

The weekly Radar revealed that the Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering requested an account check from all banks in Serbia for 5 activists: Maja Stojanović (Civic Initiatives), Katarina Đukić (ProGlas), Sofija Todorović (Youth Initiative for Human Rights), Predrag Voštinić (Local Front) and Nebojša Petković (Ne damo Jadar). With the signature of v. d. Director of the Administration Željko Radovanović, referring to the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, once again misused a state institution for the purposes of the ruling party to deal with dissidents. We would like to remind you that in 2019, the Administration also illegally requested data on bank accounts and transactions for as many as 57 individuals and organizations (the "List" case). Then the Special Reporters of the United Nations announced that the government in Serbia had misused the law to deal with critics, as well as MoneyVal - the key organization for evaluating the application of the law in this area. The latest abuse of the Directorate for the Prevention of Money Laundering is taking place at the moment of student protests, which enjoy increasing support from workers of various professions who join them in the common fight against corruption and for respect for the rule of law. Since the beginning of the protests, the ruling structure has been trying to discredit the students and present the protests as a "conspiracy of non-governmental organizations and foreign powers". For months, articles have been published claiming that civil society organizations are organizing protests, and targeting individuals from this sector. The procedure initiated by the Administration is just one more in a series of abuses of institutions by which the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) diverts attention from current protests and student blockades across the country and by which it tries to intimidate individuals who are critics of the regime. Informed by the "List" affair from 2019, the data obtained through the Administration will be used for a tabloid campaign against individuals and for the manipulation of obtained data in order to attempt to discredit current social events.

Scrawled graffiti on the premises of Krokodil association

Once again, the walls in front of the premises of the Crocodile Center were scrawled with graffiti in support of Russia's aggression towards Ukraine. The Krokodil Association actively supports refugees, including those from Ukraine, and because of this, they have been the target of vandals for years. In September of last year, a group of men broke into the association's offices and took down the flag of Ukraine. All this indicates that graffiti should be taken seriously and the perpetrators should be punished in order to prevent further serious threats to the safety of employees.