
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

March 7 - March 20, 2025

Freedom of Expression

N1 prevented from reporting

The conservative movement "Naši" pasted posters against N1 television all over Arandelovac. This movement has targeted independent media in this way before, and they have never been held accountable for it. In addition to this movement, the local government of Arandelovac also tried to make the N1 not feel desirable in this town. Namely, the N1 team was not allowed to attend the session of the local Assembly, even though they sent a request for accreditation. In the explanation, it was said that local television stations will be present and that there is no need for more teams, which is a discriminatory treatment of the media. The N1 team was prevented from reporting from the so-called "Students 2.0" camp. It is a camp in Pionirski Park in Belgrade of alleged students who oppose the blockades. Nevertheless, users of social media recognized among the alleged students employees of various state institutions, as well as other persons who are clearly not students but sympathizers of SNS. Among those who are students, students of certain private universities who are not in the blockade at all are recognized. It is believed that the SNS government is organizing and paying its supporters to cause clashes at the protest in Belgrade scheduled for March 15. The camp is fenced and the participants of this gathering are secured by the police, who prevented the N1 television crew from freely entering the public park and reporting from the field. All attacks on media workers occur at a time of heightened socio-political tensions, and government representatives only further fuel hatred and intolerance, in example the Minister of Culture, Nikola Selaković, called the newspaper Danas, television stations N1 and Nova S, and the Direktno portal "the biggest liars on the media scene."

Attacks on Journalists

Brankica Matić, a journalist from the "Storyteller" portal, was attacked on March 10 at a meeting of parents opposing the suspension of classes. While she was trying to get a statement from the parents of a student at the "Miloš Crnjanski" school in Novi Sad, a group of men first verbally attacked her, and then one of the men knocked the phone out of her hand. The police who were present did not react. Journalists are in an extremely difficult position, they are a regular target when they try to report from the gatherings of those who support the current government, while the attackers go unpunished. Activists and sympathizers of the Serbian Progressive Party also threatened a journalist from Niš while she was filming them going to a camp of the so called "Students 2.0" in Belgrade in a public utility company vehicle.

Detention of journalists and activists

The opposition politician, and currently a journalist of Zrenjanin's KTV, Nemanja Šarović, was forcibly detained while interviewing alleged students who oppose the blockades and who are camping in the park in front of the presidency. Although the participants of this camp (among whom the citizens identified: SNS sympathizers, employees in the state institutions, extras from pro-regime TV stations, members of private security, participants of the Academy of Young Leaders of the SNS, members of ultra-right organizations) attacked Šarović on several occasions, knocked the microphone out of his hand, and poured coffee over him, the police still forcibly removed this journalist whose reports from the field in recent months have gained exceptional popularity on social media networks. After being taken into custody, Šarović was taken to the Emergency Center because he fell ill. The Ministry of Internal Affairs announced that a request to initiate misdemeanor proceedings will be filed against the journalist. The day before, on March 7, the police detained a member of the Archives of Public Meetings, a citizens' association that counts participants in protests. Vladimir Nikolić, a professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, was detained while filming a protest in front of RTS with a drone. The association announced on social media that Nikolić "lost control of the drone during the flight on Friday around 6 p.m., when the aircraft suddenly changed direction and continued its flight towards Pionirski Park." As stated, after a search in the field, the drone was found in the park next to the the National Assembly, and then people who identified themselves as members of the police approached Nikolic and took him into custody. The statement adds that after giving a statement about the incident, Nikolić was released, while the police detained the drone, which made it impossible to analyze the cause of the loss of control over it and its sudden change in flight direction. Nikolić was detained by the police for several hours, and his family and colleagues did not know where he was. On March 9, X user Marko Marjanović was detained and released due to posts on social media. 5 days before his arrest, Marko was also invited to an informative interview due to the publication on the X network. On the same day, a man was also detained for allegedly insulting SNS activists while they were handing out propaganda material. Another man was detained for 30 days because of the incident in front of the SNS stand in one Belgrade municipality, although he was actually attacked by members of the SNS while he was walking with a minor child, as can be seen in the video that reached the public. The increased number of arrests takes place a few days before the announced large gathering in Belgrade. It seems that the government is starting to take more and more repressive measures in order to reduce the effect of the announced protest. Also, the government is using all mechanisms to prevent a larger influx of citizens from all over Serbia to Belgrade. The invocation of violence by the highest officials of the government is a prelude to potential conflicts that the government wants to stage on March 15, in order to use the alleged incidents for police intervention.

Freedom of Assembly.

Private security and police attacked citizens

Members of private security attacked citizens and activists who gathered in front of the Belgrade City Assembly. A woman was injured on that occasion. After a conflict with private security, the police responded and detained five activists of the "The Bridge Remains" initiative. Three activists were released a little later without any charges, one signed an agreement to admit the crime of violent behavior at a public meeting, and detention was proposed for the fifth suspect for the same crime. The detention of activists is another in a series of incidents whose purpose is to intimidate citizens participating in anti-corruption protests.

Police prevent farmers from protesting

In the previous period, the police prevented farmers from freely protesting on two occasions. First, on March 8, a group of farmers was prevented from crossing the Brankov Bridge with tractors and joining the student protest in the center of Belgrade. The police also prevented the passage of tractors from the direction of Novi Belgrade towards Zemun. Farmers in Bogatić clashed with the police at a protest in that place. The police did not allow farmers to park their outdated tractors in front of the agricultural fair that was being held at that time.

Police attacked students in front of RTS

On the evening of March 10, students in the blockade started a 22-hour blockade of the RTS building. They allowed journalists to leave the building, but not to enter. The students' action came after months of non-objective RTS reporting on student protests. On that day, they were called a "mob" by a journalist on a public media service. During the blockade, at one point there was a push with members of the Gendarmerie. One video shows a man with a cap on his head pushing the police and then passing through the cordon and disappearing, and then the police start beating the students. During the attack on the students, a member of the Gendarmerie also hit a plainclothes police officer, and the president immediately accused the students of that. In the days before the big protest in Belgrade, there were other incidents. An unknown man tore up the banners of high school students in Novi Sad. A veteran of the disbanded JSO, the unit whose members were accused of murdering Prime Minister Djindjic as well as participating in war crimes, and who was staying in Pionirski Park with "students who want to study" hit a passer-by who was filming the park.

Freedom of Association

Criminal charges against environmental activists

MP Aleksandar Jovanović Ćuta announced that the police handed Rio Tinto's criminal charges to six activists of the "Ne damo Jadar" movement. The activist of the movement, Zlatko Kokanović, stated in a video posted on social networks that the criminal complaint refers to the fact that they filmed and allegedly insulted the employees of Rio Tinto. It is a new phase in which, in addition to the state, Rio Tinto is also turning to exerting direct pressure on environmental activists to give up their activities.

The President targets CRTA

Aleksandar Vučić, presented incorrect information to the public about the alleged financial transactions of CRTA (Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability) through a project financed by USAID. Namely, Vučić manipulated the data collected by members of the Criminal Police Directorate based on the request of the prosecution on February 25 during the raid on 5 non-governmental organizations. He stated that CRTA gave 190,000 euros to the organization "Let the stench go away", and this incorrect information was then further spread by the pro-regime media. It is actually true that CRTA supported a local environmental organization from Zrenjanin with the sum of 180,000 dinars for an ecological project reporting on pollution in the city, and the project itself is called "Let the stench go away". The statement of the president of the state is another confirmation that the documents collected after the police raid on civil society organizations ended up at the address of the presidency and that they serve for a further campaign targeting pro-democracy civil society organizations in Serbia for the purpose of the final reckoning of the authorities with these organizations. Due to the serious decline of freedoms in the country, the international alliance of organizations, CIVICUS, added Serbia to the Monitor Watchlist of countries that draws attention to countries where there is a serious decline in respect for civic space.