
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

April 18 - April 30, 2025

Freedom of Expression

The men from Pioneer Park forbade the journalist to film

Insider's journalist was prevented from reporting from Pioneer Park, where there is still a camp of supposed students who want to study. There is currently a small number of men in the camp who are being secured by the police. Unknown men, despite the presence of the police, forbade journalist Irena Stević to film. The police did not react to this behavior of the men and did not allow the journalist to move safely in the public area. By the way, Pioneer Park has been fenced off for months, and after the SNS rally in Belgrade, it was extended to the street in front of the National Assembly. The people who are in the set up tents are extremely hostile towards the journalists of the independent media. Among those who are in tents, there are mostly older people, who are obviously not students, but it is still not known why they occupied public spaces and how long they will stay there.

Pressure on the University and on citizens who support student protests

In recent weeks, repressive institutional mechanisms have been intensified with the aim of exerting pressure on all those who support student blockades. Two criminal charges were filed against the rector of Belgrade University by Miloš Pavlović, a student who spoke at rallies of the Serbian Progressive Party, and who publicly represents a group of so-called students who want to learn. The rector was questioned by the police on the basis of the criminal complaint. Due to his support for students, the professor of the Faculty of Medicine in Kragujevac, Aleksandar Cvetković, was dismissed from the position of tutor by the management of this faculty immediately after he spoke at the protest. Four employees of the Main Post Office in Novi Sad claim that they were fired for participating in the 16-minute commemorative traffic blockades, as well as for supporting and participating in protests and a general strike. In addition, RTS employees who support the student blockade of the public media service, and their family members, were targeted by the pro-regime media, and five of them were invited to an informative interview at the Security Information Agency. Institutional pressures are part of a broader strategy to suppress criticism and discourage citizens from participating in social and political life.

Starting sued several people

The company that was hired as a subcontractor for the reconstruction of the Railway Station in Novi Sad, Starting, sued a total of seven people for allegedly "damaging business reputation and creditworthiness". Among the defendants are civil engineers, a professor, a lawyer, an architect, a KRIK journalist and a member of parliament. Common to all the defendants is that they publicly raised the question of how no one from this company was prosecuted for the canopy collapse in Novi Sad and that they pointed to corruption and omissions in the work that have gone unpunished so far. A company with multimillion-dollar annual profits is suing 7 individuals for damaging their business reputation, and this type of lawsuit is better known in the public as strategic lawsuits against public participation.

Freedom of Assembly

Police attacked students and citizens in Novi Sad

The first attempt to violently break the student blockade by the police in front of the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education in Novi Sad took place on April 28. The police pushed the gathered students and citizens, hit them with batons and sprayed them with tear gas. Several people were injured, including a student who was riding a bicycle to Strasbourg, and who suffered a mild concussion because the policeman hit her in the head with a shield. A professor of the Faculty of Philosophy was also injured, who was "lifted up and slammed to the ground." by the policeman. 31 people contacted the emergency center due to injuries received in the conflict with the police in front of the faculty. The fact that the names of the injured students ended up in the Informer tabloid is particularly worrying, which is a continuation of the leaking of confidential data from the institutions. The intervention unit of the police and the gendarmerie came at the invitation of the dean of this Novi Sad faculty - Patrik Drid, who entered the faculty last week and tore up student banners claiming, without any evidence, that the majority of students are against the blockade. In the general commotion that arose due to the police intervention, Drid also fell ill, and the representatives of the authorities accused the crowd of violence against the dean. Several persons were detained, including one student. At the invitation of the students, the citizens gathered to prevent re-entry of the dean, however, this time the police also came and intervened at one of the faculties in Serbia for the first time since the beginning of the blockade. The excessive use of force by the police is an indicator of the direction in which the government will try to deal with student and civil protests and blockades in the coming period, and is an indicator of the regime's lack of intention to resolve the current situation through dialogue and fulfillment of demands. This violence against the demonstrators occurred in the week when the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Michael O'Flaherty, visited Serbia, who in a statement called on the authorities to "ensure the safety of the demonstrators, to improve the working environment for civil society organizations and human rights defenders, as well as to avoid stigmatizing the demonstrators through a discourse that wrongly characterizes the demonstrations as a color revolution."

Incidents and pressures on students and citizens

Students and citizens have been blocking entrances to Radio Television of Serbia for more than two weeks, pointing to the inadequate work of the public media service, which since the beginning of student protests and blockades has repeatedly targeted students in the manner of pro-regime television stations. The only request that was made to stop the blockade is that the Parliamentary Committee for Culture and Information announce an election for new members of the REM Council, which by law should have been done by now after the previous process was suspended by the withdrawal of independent candidates due to multiple procedural irregularities and abuse of the entire process by the authorities. An unknown woman threatened the crowd in front of RTS in Takovska Street with a knife on the night of April 18, but she was neutralized and a major incident was avoided. Two men appeared in front of RTS a few days later and provoked the gathered citizens and students. The incident was recorded in front of the RTS facility in Košutnjak, where a man tried to drive his car through the blockade. Another attempt to break the blockade with car took place in New Belgrade. An employee at the Institute of the Faculty of Medical Sciences in Kragujevac tried to physically remove two students out of the faculty building. A woman who was returning from a protest in front of RTS was also physically attacked by an elderly lady. An elderly woman was in an improvised camp in front of the Parliament of Serbia and attacked a woman because she was blowing vuvuzelas and on that occasion caused her injuries, which is why the attacked woman ended up in the Emergency Center. Not only was the elderly lady not taken into custody, but quite the opposite - the attacked woman was taken into custody and was additionally targeted in the pro-regime media with the publication of a picture of her and her daughter. The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe also addressed the violence against the demonstrators. A statement from Michael O'Flaherty said: "the authorities should avoid stigmatising demonstrators through discourse that mischaracterises demonstrations as a "colour revolution". This is important in order not to turn individuals against the students, thereby creating a risk of perpetuation of the violence against them that we have seen in recent months, as car ramming or students beaten with bats. The Commissioner urges the authorities to effectively investigate all acts of violence committed during demonstrations and to bring the perpetrators to justice." In addition to physical attacks, other forms of pressure were recorded. A student who has Montenegrin citizenship and who is studying in Serbia has been banned from entering the country on the grounds that she poses a threat to the safety of Serbian citizens. This is another in a series of examples of cases where foreign nationals are banned from entering Serbia. It is important to note that the female student who was denied entry was a witness in the case of a violent incident when a group of men attacked students of the Faculty of Law and on that occasion injured 7 students. The administration of the Faculty of Medicine in Niš has threatened to initiate proceedings against the students in the blockade. All this is part of the repressive institutional pressure applied to students to force them to stop the blockades.

Freedom of Association

Environmental activist received death threats

Environmental activist Nemanja Jovanović, who is involved in the protection of Milić Hill in Belgrade, received death threats from a man who is an intermediary between sellers and buyers of plots at this location. House construction has been intensified on this hill in recent years, although it is not construction land, and the activists of the "Defend Milić hill" initiative are constantly exposed to threats and various pressures because of their activism.