
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 16 - January 29, 2026

Freedom of Expression

Professor Jelena Kleut dismissed following public support for students

The expanded Senate of the University of Novi Sad has rejected the appeal filed by Associate Professor Jelena Kleut against the Senate's initial decision not to elect her to the position of Full Professor - meaning she will lose her position at the Faculty of Philosophy. Following this decision on January 21, 2026, students and staff of the Faculty of Philosophy gathered for a protest in support of Professor Kleut, blocking the faculty premises and demanding her reinstatement, stating that the Senate's decision effectively terminated her employment. In public statements, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Minister of Education Dejan Vuk Stanković claimed that the decision regarding Professor Kleut's termination "has little to do with the state" and is a strictly academic matter. Meanwhile, the faculty has sent an urgent request to the Administrative Court for an interim measure that would allow Professor Kleut to potentially continue working while legal proceedings are ongoing. Professor Kleut assessed that what happened to her could mark the beginning of a practice previously unseen at the University of Novi Sad, which, in her words, could lead to the removal of anyone who "speaks out more loudly" from the academic context. She further commented that, within the context of academic journalism departments, there is a clear articulation of the state of the media, and expressed concern among her colleagues who have spoken out publicly that their own academic evaluations could also be brought before "politicized bodies." These events point to a continuity of practices where the employment status of staff is altered following public engagement related to student protests.

Targeting of N1 Journalists

Journalists from N1 television, Sanja Kosović and Ina Džakula, were targeted on posters that appeared on January 23, 2026, in the town of Kula and other locations within the Kula municipality, including Ruski Krstur and Kruščić. Their photographs were used alongside messages linking them to the local organization "Mladi Kula" (Youth of Kula). These posts and posters utilized text and visual content emphasizing that the journalists "do not bear Serbian first and last names," while incorporating symbols of the Ustaše movement, which directly incites hatred. Regarding this incident, the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) issued a statement calling on competent authorities to react urgently. ANEM has filed a criminal complaint against unidentified perpetrators for inciting hatred and harassment via Instagram, highlighting that the photographs and messages used in the posts specifically targeted the journalists because of their professional identity.

Death threats and intimidation of journalists

Over the past two weeks, dangerous attacks and death threats targeting media professionals have been recorded. Predrag Simonović, a retired Ministry of Interior (MUP) inspector and columnist for the weekly Radar, reported receiving threats via comments following the publication of his column titled "A new UKP takes the stage." The comments suggested that instead of writing, he should "go for a walk by the frozen Danube at an ill-fated time." Simonović stated that while he did not mention specific names in the piece, "those in the know know exactly who it is about," referencing public cases involving the recovery of bodies from the Danube.

Simultaneously, Igor Velić, a journalist from Bor, faced death threats via social media. These threats were condemned by the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) on January 25, 2026, noting that such comments seriously jeopardize his safety. The threats appeared under video content on the "Borski blok" Facebook page, where multiple profiles posted comments containing explicit calls for violence, including calls for liquidation and lynching, as well as insults and demeaning labels directed at Velić.

In another string of attacks, journalist and photojournalist Marko Dragoslavić was subjected to threats, stalking, and harassment by unidentified individuals in Belgrade on January 15, 2026. Consequently, the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) filed a report with the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade. The situation escalated on the evening of January 19, around 8:00 PM, when Dragoslavić reported a threatening message and communication to the Zvezdara Police Station. Later that night, unidentified persons rang his intercom and pounded on his apartment door. Dragoslavić reported this to the police by phone; however, the police patrol that arrived at the scene did not find the individuals involved.

These cases of death threats are part of a broader series of pressures against journalists and media workers, including social media targeting, hacking attacks on newsrooms, the suspension of critical media accounts, and public insults by government officials. The threats were issued immediately following the publication of critical texts or reports, pointing to a pattern in which journalists are put at risk due to their professional work.

In all three cases, independent journalists' associations, including ANEM and NUNS, have filed criminal complaints with the competent prosecutor's offices and called on the police and judicial authorities to urgently identify and prosecute those responsible.

Bot attacks and Instagram account suspensions of Nova.rs and Radar

As part of a new wave of bot and hacking attacks on independent media, the Instagram accounts of Nova.rs and Radar were targeted once again. In a single hour, the Nova.rs Instagram account gained approximately 20,000 new bot followers, while Radar's account grew by about 10,000. Similar bot activity was registered on the accounts of other media outlets, including N1, Danas, and Nova TV. Prior to this, the Nova.rs accounts were temporarily suspended, and Radar's account was deactivated following bot-driven activities. Both accounts were restored to the platform after user appeals and a response from Meta. These bot attacks also targeted other media accounts, including the portal Danas. Journalists' associations are demanding that competent authorities and the platform itself investigate and identify the organizers of these activities. Media professionals have filed complaints with Instagram and contacted Meta's support regarding these suspensions and deactivations. In addition to Nova and Radar, other profiles were targeted, including the organizations CRTA and Osnažene, the media movement Autonomija, the Novi Sad-based outlet VOICE, and the personal profile of photographer Gavrilo Andrić. Furthermore, the account of the citizens' association Zajednička akcija Blok 70/70a was also removed.

Dismissal for supporting students and protests

A new case of dismissal due to public support for students and protests occurred on January 23, 2026, when the Secretary of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Belgrade, Marija Radovanović, received a notice of dismissal. The former Secretary, Radovanović, considers this decision unlawful, stating that the true reason for her dismissal is her support for students during the blockade and her efforts to point out illegalities in the work of faculty bodies, including the dismissal of the then-dean, Professor Tatjana Simić. According to Radovanović, the termination notice cited several unfounded and nonsensical reasons. Previously, on September 8, 2025, Radovanović sent a report regarding illegalities at the faculty and a recording of a Council session to the Ministry of Education. This action had earlier resulted in her email being blocked and a formal warning prior to dismissal from the faculty management. Medical students and a portion of the academic community organized a protest in support of the Faculty of Medicine staff, stating that the dismissal is part of a broader pressure campaign against those who supported the student blockade and opposed the faculty administration's policies. Marija Radovanović has announced that her lawyers are preparing a lawsuit for the courts of general jurisdiction, based on claims that the dismissal was illegal. She will also seek an interim measure to be reinstated to her position until the legal dispute is concluded. The case of Marija Radovanović fits into a wider series of actions taken against employees in higher education institutions who have publicly expressed support for student demands or participated in academic initiatives.

Freedom of Assembly

Police intervention at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad

On January 21, 2026, students of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Novi Sad gathered inside the faculty building to support Professor Jelena Kleut after she lost her position, announcing they would not leave until she was reinstated. Around 4:00 PM, at the request of the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Milivoj Alanović, members of the police and the Gendarmerie entered the building and used physical force to evict the students, professors, and citizens involved in the blockade. According to student testimonies, the police used shields and fists while removing the crowd from the building. Following the operation, police vans remained on the scene, and a police presence was maintained throughout the campus. Citizens and students from several cities supported the blockade, stating that the protest was a direct response to the dismissal of Professor Kleut. Media organizations reported live from the scene during the police intervention. In the nights and days following the intervention, the students in the blockade continued to post messages stating that their gathering and support would not end with their removal from the building, pointing out that these events are part of ongoing actions within the context of changes and protests inside the academic community.