
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 30 - February 12, 2026

Freedom of Expression

Death threats against journalist in propaganda film

The propaganda film "Evil Times 2: The Creation of Propaganda," produced by the Novi Sad-based Center for Social Stability, has been broadcast on national frequency channels and other pro-government outlets. Among other content, the film uses a photograph of Veran Matić, Chairman of the Board of the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) and member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, taken at the exact location where journalist Slavko Ćuruvija was murdered (Svetogorska 35, Belgrade). This is part of a narrative that presents him in a negative and accusatory context. In the film, Matić is portrayed with insinuations of treason and other generalized accusations without clear evidence. The film is being aired by national television stations such as B92, Prva, and Informer. The broadcasting of such a film, which directly links Matić to past tragic events and uses his image in the context of the Ćuruvija murder, has sparked grave concerns regarding his personal safety and public perception. In response, journalists' and media associations, including members of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists (SRG) and Association of Independent Electronic Media in Serbia (ANEM), have filed a criminal complaint with the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime regarding the broadcast and the accompanying campaign. They state that Veran Matić's safety has been jeopardized and that the film is part of a broader targeting effort. This is not an isolated case of targeting journalists and activists by the Center for Social Stability, and the new propaganda film also targets other professionals, including KRIK editor Stevan Dojčinović and attorney Kruna Savović.

Threats and pressure due to support for the student movement

The Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) warned the public on February 5, 2026, that university professors at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, including Prof. Dr. Smiljana Milinkov, Assistant Prof. Dr. Stefan Janjić, and Teaching Assistant Ksenija Pavkov, received identical threatening email messages at their official university addresses. The messages, which arrived on February 4, 2026, stated: "Read this. The Black Hand has marked you. It knows everything. Watch out. A friend." Identical threats had previously been sent in September 2025 to Professor Smiljana Milinkov, who reported the case to the police at the time but received no feedback from the authorities by February 2026. The NDNV statement noted that these threats should concern all citizens as they indicate that academics, journalists, and others protecting professional integrity and human rights are exposed to threats without an adequate response from the authorities.

Pressure for supporting students also extended to high school students. Lazar Zgonjanin, a student at the Fifth Belgrade Gymnasium, became the subject of a disciplinary procedure after giving a statement to N1 television. In his statement, he criticized the awarding of the Saint Sava Award to acting director Danka Nešović and highlighted issues within the school. Following the interview, Zgonjanin was questioned by the school psychologist for several hours and faced the possibility of disciplinary measures, including expulsion, for expressing his opinion. This occurred amid a long-standing conflict at the gymnasium, which previously included a months-long blockade by students demanding leadership changes.

In the broader context of reprisals, nearly 170 employees in the Provincial Administration of Vojvodina were declared unassigned, since the beginning of 2026, and as of February 1, 2026, the first dismissals began. One of the employees, Slavko Matić, who served in the administration for nearly a quarter of a century, stated that he first received an unassigned status contract in December 2025, followed by a notice of dismissal. According to Matić, this was a direct result of his participation in protests, adding that workers were punished for supporting student and civic movements. Matić emphasized that he was never a political activist or a member of any party, but was dismissed due to civic activism, including his presence at the reception for student cyclists in Budapest. He noted that the dismissal notices were delivered without prior explanation and were full of errors. Matić and other workers have announced that they will file lawsuits in courts of general jurisdiction to contest their dismissals.

Freedom of Association

Attack on students during the "Student in every village" campaign

During the "Student in every village" campaign organized on February 7, 2026, in the village of Darosava near Arandjelovac, students visiting households to speak with residents reported being followed, filmed, provoked, and harassed by unidentified individuals. According to the students, unknown men and women approached their stand and followed student groups, filming them and shouting questions such as "Who is paying you?" while making derogatory comments during their conversations with locals. In one instance, a man reportedly attempted to physically assault a student, who was forced to retreat into a car to avoid the confrontation. The students reported the situation to the police and requested that the harassment be officially recorded. Although a police car arrived in the village center, students stated that the officers failed to intervene or remove the individuals who were provoking them. Several residents of Darosava and representatives of the "Zbor Arandjelovac" organization were present and provided support to the students during the incident. This event represents another in a series of organized attacks and provocations targeting students during the "Student in every village" campaign.

Security Intelligence Agency pressure on farmers

Hundreds of dairy producers from central Serbia organized a protest and blockade of the Ibarska highway near Mrčajevci and Knić on February 11, 2026. The demonstration was held to express dissatisfaction with low milk purchase prices, excessive imports, and the lack of support for domestic agriculture. Farmers participating in the protest reported that they faced pressure from members of the Security Intelligence Agency (BIA) during the day and night leading up to the gathering. One farmer stated that BIA agents made inquiries about the protest plans and attempted to dissuade them from organizing, even offering "advice" on how to proceed, actions which the farmers interpreted as a clear form of intimidation and pressure regarding their decision to protest. The demonstration follows months of agricultural hardship, including falling purchase prices and a surge in cheap imported dairy products. The protest culminated in a road blockade and the symbolic pouring of several tons of milk as a warning to the Government to meet their demands. Following the protest, agricultural associations and organizers publicly emphasized that attempts to influence their decisions and questioning conducted without clear legal grounds served as additional factors in their decision to take to the streets and demand change.

Freedom of Assembly

Threats against female activists in the Kula municipality

Female activists in the Kula municipality have been targeted with threats involving gender-based violence as a tool for political intimidation and an attempt to remove them from the public sphere. These threats were directed at at least 14 women who are publicly engaged in their communities and participate in local social and political activities. The messages contained degrading and compromising content of a gender-based nature. According to civil society organizations supporting the activists, these threats constitute digital and gender-based violence. It has been emphasized that these incidents are occurring within the context of a local election campaign, indicating that violent messaging is being used as a weapon of political warfare. Some social media posts have announced the release of compromising and explicit photographs of the activists, which legal experts have characterized as a potential criminal offense falling under the jurisdiction of the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime. Civil society organizations, including women's and feminist groups, have condemned these threats and called on competent institutions to act urgently, identify those responsible, and provide protection to the targeted individuals. They emphasized that the fight against violence towards women is a fundamental issue of human rights and democracy.

Vandalism of activist's vehicle

During the night between February 9 and 10, 2026, in the Erdoglija neighborhood of Kragujevac, the car of local activist Stevan Mihajlović was intentionally damaged. Mihajlović reported the incident to the police, stating that he is also concerned for the safety of his family. Prior to this incident, Mihajlović had reportedly been targeted in the media, including posts on local portals, while his public engagement, specifically his support for student activities and criticism of the authorities, was being scrutinized on social media. In response to the vandalism of his vehicle, citizen assemblies in Kragujevac called for a support rally, which was held on February 10, 2026, at Đački Trg. Participants included citizens, students, and local organized groups who stated that the incident cannot be viewed merely as an act of vandalism, but rather as an attempt to intimidate those who publicly express dissenting opinions.