
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

February 13 - March 5, 2026

Freedom of Expression

High-level state officials attack and target N1 journalists

In the previous period, a large number of verbal and physical attacks on journalists were recorded. Insults and targeting of journalists from television N1, once again came from the state leadership, when the President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, and the President of the National Assembly, Ana Brnabić, stated that the editorial office of N1 television had “inspired” a planned assassination attempt on the president and those closest to him. Such statements directly increase the number of threats and endanger the safety of journalists and affect editorial independence. The Independent Journalists’ Association of Serbia (NUNS) and the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) strongly condemned the rhetoric of the president and the speaker of parliament and called on them to immediately stop making such statements, warning that inciting hatred toward the media is not acceptable in a democratic society. Alarming data from the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation show that in the past six months Aleksandar Vučić targeted media and journalists at least 105 times in his statements and appearances, on Instagram or at press conferences, while Ana Brnabić did so at least 73 times.

When insults and targeting of journalists come from the state leadership, it is not surprising that during a protest in Surdulica on February 16, 2026, journalist Dejana Cvetković, who was reporting from the protest, was faced with insults such as “trash” and “liar.” Because of the way the journalist conveyed chauvinistic chants and the demands of the protest participants, which later escalated into calls for the persecution and expulsion of the family of a driver of Albanian origin, she faced insults and threats. In one Viber group, her personal data and links to her social media profiles were shared, which led to further harassment. In addition to her, other journalists also received threats, including a journalist from the portal infoVranjske, after they shared information about this case.

The verbal conflict did not bypass journalist Tijana Zarić while she was reporting from a protest of citizens who were blocking construction works in Kosovska Street in Belgrade on February 16, 2026. On that occasion, a woman began shouting at the gathered crowd and then verbally attacked journalist Zarić while she was reporting live for N1. The woman got in her face and filmed her with a mobile phone, which interfered with her professional reporting.

Hacker attacks and threats against journalists of the Radar and Revolt portals

The website of the weekly Radar is once again facing multi-day hacker attacks on its servers, due to which the site has been practically non-functional since mid-February 2026 and users have been unable to access it. The attacks, which began around 13 February, are hindering not only access to published texts but also the work of the newsroom itself. Other independent media outlets, such as Južne vesti, are in a similar situation.

After activists Ivan Bjelić and Lazar Dinić published the names and biographies of attackers from the protest in front of the Serbian Progressive Theatre on 17 February on the portal “Revolt”, who had attacked students and journalists, they received threatening messages stating that they would be “cut into pieces” and that “their end is near”. Dinić and Bjelić were insulted, called “Ustaše”, and received death threats, which constitutes the criminal offense of endangering safety.

Predrag Simonović, a retired major of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) of Serbia and a columnist for the Belgrade weekly Radar, received threats after publishing articles in Radar about the security services. The attack escalated when an unknown person, using a phone number from a foreign operator, harassed his child and wife through video calls. Due to the lack of reaction from the prosecution and the MUP, Simonović decided to relocate his family from Serbia for their safety. He stated that, when it comes to his personal safety, he had long been “left to fend for himself” by the state.

Freedom of Association

New pressures and detentions of farmers

Since 10 February, farmers' associations have blocked more than 80 main, regional and local roads across the country in order to express dissatisfaction with working conditions in agriculture, problems with milk purchase, and other demands addressed to the relevant ministry. In Vojvodina and other parts of the country, the police issued a large number of misdemeanor charges against protest participants due to the blockades and alleged improper parking, which the farmers described as a form of repression. Farmers organized within the Initiative for the Survival of Farmers of Serbia demanded the immediate cessation of repression and the withdrawal of all misdemeanor charges, warning that otherwise they would further radicalize the protests.

At the Badovinci border crossing on 1 March 2026, the police intervened during a blockade organized by farmers and detained five people. According to the lawyer's statements, there is suspicion that one of the detained individuals had a broken arm, while others were allegedly beaten during the police intervention. The lawyer also stated that medical assistance was not immediately provided to those detained. During the intervention, the police chased blockade participants across nearby fields and private yards. A protest was held the same day in the vicinity of Loznica. At the protest involving farmers and citizens at the Trbušnica border crossing near Loznica, 12 people were detained and are suspected of failing to comply with orders of police officers. One of the twelve detained farmers stated that he had been standing peacefully in front of the police cordon when he was detained without reason. Activist from the association Ne damo Jadar, Zlatko Kokanović, was also detained and later released after his lawyer filed an appeal against the decision on detention. However, Kokanović was detained again on 2 February and was then ordered into custody for 30 days.

A twenty-two-year-old man who organized farmers' protests in the village of Bešenovo near Sremska Mitrovica was brutally beaten on 2 March 2026 while leaving his family home by car. Three men blocked his way with a tractor, after which one of them got out and threatened him with a metal baseball bat and brass knuckles, saying "now I'll block you a bit," before repeatedly striking him on the knees, fingers and back. The injured man reportedly recognized the attacker as a member of the local Serbian Progressive Party organization. The police detained all three suspects, who are being charged with attempted murder.

Attack on students

Students who, on 28 February 2026 in Sevojno, were conducting a door-to-door campaign called "A student in every village" experienced multiple verbal attacks from men who, according to a witness from the association United for Sevojno, arrived in two cars and repeatedly attacked them with words. The incident occurred during the field campaign, and the attackers were reportedly members of the Serbian Progressive Party. In the context of the elections scheduled for 29 March 2026, citizens and students have faced numerous attacks, and students conducting the "A student in every village" campaign are increasingly exposed to both verbal and physical assaults by supporters of the Serbian Progressive Party.

Incidents at the protest

During the ceremony marking 198 years of Matica Srpska in Novi Sad on 17 February, attended by the state officials, a group of students, citizens, and activists was prevented from protesting in front of the building of the Serbian National Theatre. During the ceremony, activists, citizens, and students reported that unknown individuals and activists of the Serbian Progressive Party physically pushed them, recorded them with mobile phones, and provoked them, while the police formed a cordon preventing access to the public space. Journalistic teams attempting to record the actions of individuals in civilian clothes were also obstructed, and some reporters had their shots physically blocked. Although uniformed police were nearby, they did not intervene to protect the citizens' right to free movement and assembly, nor did they identify the civilians applying force. Students reported that assailants beat their colleagues, resulting in one person sustaining a fractured skull and another a broken tooth. A previously convicted aggressor and SNS supporter, Gorski Matović, physically attacked students and struck a female student's head against a wall. Attending citizens also described cigarette butts being thrown at them and received insulting and threatening messages. The students were then taken to the Emergency Center for treatment of injuries. During the attack, police in riot gear did not intervene to prevent the assaults.

During this protest, a group of men also physically attacked journalist Žarko Bogosavljević while he was reporting from the field and wearing visible press markings. Bogosavljević repeatedly stated verbally that he was a journalist, but the group approached him, pushed him against a wall, and struck him on the arm and back, causing his mobile phone to fall and be stepped on while he was on the ground. Other journalists from the same group were also pushed and exposed to aggression.

Freedom of Assembly

BCSP targeted by the minister for European integration and tabloids

Tabloids and pro-government television channels, with the involvement of the Minister for European Integration in the Government, Nemanja Starović, have launched a recent campaign targeting the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP), one of the founders of the EU Convention and coordinator of the Chapter 24 Working Group. Accusations from the tabloids and Minister Starović deliberately manipulate information about civil society participation at the Munich Security Conference, during which BCSP members organized and took part in discussions on policy and security. The National Convention on the European Union (NKEU) publicly condemned this targeting of civil society organizations, stating that such activities are standard practice at international forums and that “discussions about Serbia with international partners are not an attack on Serbia.” It was noted that the campaign against civil society is part of a broader trend of delegitimizing organizations that critically analyze public policy, and that such narratives cannot be labeled as “secret diplomacy.”

In addition to this case, TV Informer recently launched a brutal and inappropriate attack on professors of the Faculty of Law at the University of Belgrade on its program. The Association of Judicial Assistants condemned the incident, stating that it is unacceptable for educators to be publicly lynched and insulted simply for performing their duties and supporting students, noting that the program sought to undermine the reputation of higher education. In response to the Informer broadcast on 14 February 2026, which named and targeted Law Faculty professors, the Association emphasized that “professors are not media figures.” This attack was also condemned by a group of feminist organizations, which stated that the case represents an abuse of media space for political retribution against the academic community.

Suspensions over activism

At the Fifth Belgrade Gymnasium, six staff members were once again suspended. The suspensions were issued on 23 February 2026 by acting principal Danka Nešović, who stated that the employees’ actions had “undermined the school’s reputation.” One of the reasons cited was their participation in a discussion at the Academic Committee for Education of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, alongside students’ parents. The decision prompted reactions from the Parents’ Council, which considered the measures unjustified and harmful to the school’s functioning. History teachers from the same school had previously been suspended due to social media posts and their support for students.