



Three Freedoms Under the Magnifying Glass Violations of Basic Human Rights in Serbia

April 24 - May 7, 2026

Freedom of Expression

Attacks on citizens during the “Students Win” campaign

An associate professor at the University of Novi Sad was physically assaulted in the presence of his wife and minor daughter, for possessing stickers with the message “Students Win”. The incident occurred because the professor was carrying stickers supporting student activities, after which he was approached and attacked by a group of individuals. He was struck on the arm, while his wife and daughter were subjected to verbal threats and harassment. The Academic Plenum reacted to the event, linking the attack to the content of the stickers and the public expression of support for student activities. The statement characterized the event as physical and verbal violence directed at the professor due to his activism.

On April 25, in the center of town of Indija, a group of thugs attacked citizens, intercepted passers-by, and seized personal belongings, while some citizens faced direct threats. A group of 22 men took one man into the yard of a high school and onto the roof of a nearby building, where he was threatened. Following reports, the police acted on the case, and the matter was forwarded to the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Stara Pazova for further processing and identification of the attackers. The incidents were triggered by attempts to display “Students Win” banners in the town, and the group that caused the incident was led by known thug coordinators.

Attack on “Palanka Info” journalist

Stevan Jeremić, a journalist for the “Palanka Info” portal, was attacked on April 28, 2026, in Smederevska Palanka while reporting from a performance at the “Olga Milošević” Primary School. The journalist was approached by a man, a citizen of Smederevska Palanka and a former member of the police, who directed threats, curses, and insults at him regarding social media comments, after which he physically attacked him and kicked him in the back. The Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) requested that the competent authorities identify and punish the attacker.

This event represents a continuation of a series of cases endangering the safety of journalists in Serbia, as evidenced by UNS data. Serbia records its worst results on international media freedom lists, and this clearly shows part of a broader situation where the safety of journalists and conditions for free reporting are further called into question through physical attacks, threats, and pressures.

Pressures in Education

Pressures in education continue in this reporting period. The principal of the “September 17” Secondary School in Lajkovac was dismissed by a decision of the Ministry of Education after refusing to participate in political activities in the school. The former principal stated that she considers her dismissal to be politically motivated because she did not participate in political activities, including claims that she did not “push colleagues onto buses for SNS rallies.” A portion of the students entered a boycott of classes based on a decision by the student parliament, citing dissatisfaction with the way the dismissal was carried out and pointing to a lack of transparency in the process.

Dušan Kokot, President of the Independent Union of Education Workers of Serbia (NSPRS), stated that since the beginning of the school year in Serbia, more than 200 principals of primary and secondary schools have been dismissed or have withdrawn under pressure. According to his statements, these dismissals and withdrawals occur due to pressure on principals to act according to directives with which, as he claims, many do not agree and which they consider problematic in relation to the collective and professional standards.

Retaliation against Ministry of Interior (MUP) employees

A disciplinary initiative was launched against an instructor and police lieutenant colonel at the Basic Police Training Center (COPO) due to a post he published on his personal Facebook profile in June of last year, when he went to pay his respects to those who died in the canopy collapse. In the post, he stated that the tragedy was a consequence of corruption and crime and described the atmosphere near the railway station, after which the MUP leadership assessed that he had committed a serious breach of official duty in the form of “behavior that harms the reputation of the Ministry.” The disciplinary initiative is based on the claim that police officers are obliged to behave in a manner that does not damage the reputation of the MUP even outside of service, including social media posts. His attorney, lawyer Goran Stupar, assessed that this is a crackdown on police officers who publicly express views that are not in line with the views of the authorities.

This is not the first case of pressure within the ranks of the MUP, and it raises the question of the limits of freedom of expression for police members, especially when it comes to opinions relating to social events, criticism of corruption, and the work of institutions.

Threats against an activist

Luka Jovanović, an activist from Ub who was previously sued by SNS official Darko Glišić for sticking caricature stickers with his likeness, received serious threats after the trial. After the hearing at the Basic Court in Ub, the activist was approached by a person who openly directed threats at him, including messages that he would be physically attacked if he “did not stop acting tough,” as well as that they would “chop him up.” The person who threatened him also told him that people “will only just begin to fear them.” The activist also states that several thugs were present in the company of Darko Glišić in front of the court, which further intensified the sense of intimidation. Lawyers and defense representatives assess that these are serious threats to life.

Freedom of Assembly

Incidents in the city Municipality of Zemun

For more than a year, citizens of the Belgrade municipality of Zemun have been paying tribute to the victims of the tragic canopy collapse every day for a duration of 16 minutes. At the same location, on Avijatičarski Trg and Glavna Street, members of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) set up promotional stands on April 24. Citizens who saw this act as a provocation gathered near the stands, during which verbal clashes occurred. Riot police were also present at the scene. The president of this municipality, Gavriilo Kovačević, was also at the scene and, during a verbal conflict with Biljana Stojković, a professor at the Faculty of Biology, announced that he would “beat us (the protesting citizens) again.” The following day, during the re-setting of the stands, the municipal president, in a conversation with an N1 television reporter, directed insults at this media outlet. On that occasion, he called N1 television “blockading-fascist-terrorist” and accused it of bearing part of the responsibility for the incidents that occurred the previous evening.

Abduction of an activist

Activists of the Rakovica Citizens' Assembly announced that their activist was attacked in the Resnik neighborhood of Belgrade following an action to distribute “Students Win” stickers on April 29, when several unknown men physically assaulted him and forcibly pushed him into a car without license plates. The activist was abducted, driven in an unknown direction, later returned in front of his house, and then transported to the VMA (Military Medical Academy).

A few days after the incident, the activist filed a criminal complaint against the persons he recognized as the attackers, while the prosecution launched a pre-investigation procedure. According to the lawyer, the case is legally qualified as unlawful deprivation of liberty and violent behavior, with a note that the possibility of qualifying it as kidnapping is being investigated. Activists and members of the assembly state that the attackers acted in an organized manner, that they physically attacked the activist, pushed him into a vehicle, and drove him away, which they assessed as an attempt to intimidate participants in local activities. A protest was also organized in the Resnik neighborhood due to the abduction of the activist from this municipality, with strong support stating that violence will not scare the people who are fighting for a better society.

Freedom of Association

Student Parliament Elections: tensions, conflicts, and targeting of students

The political struggle between supporters and opponents of the government in Serbia is also being waged for dominance in independent bodies and organizations. Elections for student parliaments and various professional associations have been accompanied for months by tensions, incidents, and suspicions of irregularities. After the elections for the Student Parliament at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Belgrade were held in mid-April 2026, reactions from teaching staff and student organizations followed. According to professors of the Faculty of Medicine, the election process for the Student Parliament has been irreparably compromised on multiple levels after irregularities were observed during the election procedure and the counting of votes, which called the regularity of the elections into question. As a reminder, the elections at this faculty were held on April 16, 2026, and two student organizations participated. "Sinapsa," supported by students in blockade, and "Medicinski krug," which previously held a majority role in the student parliament. During the voting and counting process, Sinapsa challenged the preliminary results, stating that 209 ballots were found in the voting material that differed in color from the rest, with the same choice circled on all those ballots; the election day ended with police intervention following suspicions of ballot forgery.

Professors and a portion of the students of this faculty point to the erosion of trust in the election process, as well as the tensions that arose between different student groups. At the same time, the situation was followed by other incidents and reports of irregularities during and after the elections, including an incident at the Silos building in Belgrade, located across from the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Medicine, where students in blockade had been staying for almost a year. There, a flag saying "Silos is with the students," which had been put up earlier as a symbol of support, was torn, and stickers targeting students of this faculty were stuck on the building itself. Such events are interpreted as another indicator of the ruling party's intention to further destabilize and compromise the election process at the Faculty of Medicine, as well as at other faculties.

Disciplinary proceedings were initiated against a student of the Faculty of Law in Niš due to a verbal incident on the eve of the student elections at that faculty; he is charged with telling a female colleague from an opposing election list that she is a "ćaci". Possible sanctions listed include a warning, temporary removal from the faculty, a ban on taking exams, and even expulsion from the faculty. According to his own statements reported in the media, the accused student connected the incident with previous tensions during the election process, including situations in which clashes between student lists were observed.

Another case of election manipulation was seen in Novi Sad. Namely, a group of students gathered in "Voice of Students of the Faculty of Philosophy" filed an appeal to the Faculty's Teaching and Scientific Council because the elections for the student parliament at this faculty were not called within the legally prescribed period, thereby violating students' rights to elect and be elected to faculty bodies, rights guaranteed by the Law on Student Organizing. About 100 appeals were submitted in a short period of time, and students stated that they wanted to point out the violation of their right to elect and be elected to student bodies. In a statement by five student organizations united in the request to call elections, it is emphasized that the failure to call elections is not just a procedural omission, but a "direct violation of the constitutional right to education and the right to participate in the management of an institution of public importance."

Suspension of a Union Representative in a factory after a strike

In the MTU factory in Nova Pazova, a dispute broke out between workers and management after the organization of a one-hour warning strike in April 2026. Workers stopped work for one hour at the call of the “Independence” union, demanding an increase in compensation for overtime and night work, an increase in holiday allowance, as well as the implementation of labor inspection decisions and the suspension of disciplinary proceedings against one union member. Only one day after the strike, the factory management served the union representative Radoje Zarubica with a decision on temporary removal from work. According to the union, his official computer was taken, and his access to the workplace and union members was blocked. Alleged disclosure of business secrets was cited as the reason for the suspension. The “Independence” union assessed this measure as unfounded and unjustified, stating that it comes immediately after the warning strike, and requested an urgent meeting with management. According to the union, the representative is prevented from further contact with union members during the suspension, and there was a warning that his employment contract could be terminated upon the expiration of that period.