

ELECTIONS

UNDER THE MAGNIFYING GLASS



days
until the
elections

Civic Initiatives will continuously monitor and record cases of violations of freedom of expression, assembly and association during the pre-election campaign. We will point out all omissions and illegal actions during the election campaign, including cases of abuse of: public resources and public office for campaigning. We will report on all these issues on a weekly basis to the interested public.

Introduction

Figures That Raise Questions About the Integrity of the Upcoming Elections

The Republic Electoral Commission (RIK) has adopted a decision establishing that there are 6.450.523 registered voters in Serbia for the snap parliamentary elections scheduled for 25 October. Tanasije Marinković, a member of RIK, said he could not believe the figures, adding that he had expected to receive the report on the audit of the voter register as early as the beginning of September. He further noted that some members of the Commission for the Audit of the Voter Register had pointed to a complete lack of consistency between different records, and stated that he would not vote in favour of adopting the decision. Sofija Mandić, another RIK member, said that, according to the September report by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), numerous stakeholders had raised concerns about the unusually high number of registered voters in certain localities. She stressed that the number of registered voters is virtually identical to Serbia's total population, which is a cause for concern, as the number of registered voters cannot be the same as the total number of inhabitants.

The number of valid identity cards held by adults in Serbia increased by more than 236.000 between 18 May and 28 September (and by more than 244.000 when minors are included), according to Ognjen Rašuo, a member of the Commission for the Audit, Verification and Control of the Accuracy and Updating of the Voter Register. He cited data obtained from the Ministry of the Interior (MUP). RIK did not include on its agenda a proposal submitted by some of its members calling for the adoption of a conclusion requiring the urgent receipt of data from the MUP on valid identity cards issued, as well as clarification of the discrepancies identified in the statistical data provided.

Children in Election Campaign Ads

The Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) decided not to impose sanctions on the television broadcasters that aired a campaign advertisement for the "United Serbia" electoral list featuring children. The broadcasters in question were RTS, RTV, B92, Pink, Prva and K1, all of which denied that airing the advertisement constituted a violation of the law. The proposal to take further action failed to secure sufficient votes, as the majority of REM members considered that no violation of the law had occurred. Some members of the REM Council voted in favour of imposing sanctions on the broadcasters that aired the advertisement. One REM member, Rodoljub Šabić, stated that the case involved the "most direct and most obvious" misuse of children for political purposes. Civil society organisations had already raised concerns about the close ties between certain members of the REM and the state authorities, specifically those who voted against imposing sanctions on the broadcasters. These members regularly vote against similar measures, thereby undermining the very purpose and effectiveness of the regulatory body.

Freedom of Expression

Violence and Pressure Against Citizens and Activists

Actor Aleksandar Marinković wrote on social media that his son had been beaten by participants gathered around a Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) stand, which is set up outside the entrance to the theatre every day. According to his father, the young man was attacked while taking a photo with his girlfriend in front of the theatre entrance, when he turned his phone towards the SNS stand. Five men rushed over and tried to snatch his phone. When he refused to hand it over, they beat him and forced him to delete the photographs. They thoroughly checked whether he had also deleted them from the gallery and the trash folder. They then humiliated him and threatened to kill him and subject him to further violence if they saw him there again, Marinković stated. He added that, at the time of the attack outside the theatre, there was no rally, no student gathering, and no presence of other political parties; the only political presence there was the SNS stand. Marinković said that his son had been taken to the emergency medical service and a children's hospital, where he was diagnosed with minor bodily injuries.



The Movement for Change in Focus (PUF) announced that its members, Petar Petrović and Milan Minja Pernat, had been taken to a police station and detained there until the end of an SNS rally in Zrenjanin, at which Aleksandar Vučić, the lead candidate on the party's electoral list, also addressed the crowd. At the same time, according to the movement, Sonja Pernat, Miljan Čičić, a KTV television crew, and Nemanja Šarović were prevented from moving freely. They stated that police officers had forcibly pushed and struck them before surrounding them in a cordon from which they were unable to leave.

The Kreni-Promeni movement reported that employees of Dunav Osiguranje were under political pressure to attend an SNS rally in Novi Sad, and that managers at the company had been instructed to ensure that workers attended the party gathering. According to the movement, department directors had received orders from the company's senior management to coerce employees into attending the rally. The alleged pressure was not limited to securing attendance at the event, but also extended to the use of the company's premises, equipment, and other resources for party-related activities.

The use of force to restrict freedom of movement and freedom of expression has become an everyday occurrence in Serbia, and these cases further illustrate this trend. The question remains how safe journalists, activists, and citizens will be on election day, 25 October.

Repression on Journalists and Media

The Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) announced that it had reported a threat of serious violence against Nemanja Šarović to the Special Public Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime. The comment, directed at Šarović, a presenter on KTV, was posted beneath a publication on the Instagram page of the organisation "Love, Faith, Hope," which he heads. In the post, Šarović condemned the police for preventing and obstructing the KTV crew from reporting on a public gathering of SNS supporters. ANEM described the threat as posing a serious risk to Šarović's safety.

SNS security personnel in Zaječar prevented TV Nova journalist Katarina Golubović and the Glas Zaječara team, consisting of Miljko Stojanović and cameraman Đorđe Đorđević, from reporting on a rally held by the ruling party in the city. They repeatedly held the journalists back and ultimately barred them from approaching the rally venue, claiming that they posed a security threat.



Ricardo Gutiérrez, Secretary-General of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), described the forceful takeover of the Nova.rs news portal as the latest episode in a wave of repression in Serbia. He expressed the EFJ's full support for the Nova.rs editorial team. Gutiérrez stressed that Serbia was undoubtedly the country in Europe that had experienced the sharpest decline in media freedom in recent months. Ratko Femić, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Nova.rs, said that the appointment of Marko Stjepanović and the ultimatum requiring employees to state within less than 48 hours whether they wished to leave the company amounted to overt pressure on the editorial team and an attempt to bring it into line immediately ahead of the 25 October elections.

Freedom of Assembly

Students from Čačak and Gornji Milanovac announced today that, over the past several days, they had noticed unidentified individuals in cars following them during organised student activities. They added that unidentified individuals had photographed the registration plates of their vehicles in a car park and that the same individuals had been spotted near their premises. The students further reported that the same car had repeatedly followed a female colleague who lives outside the city at night, driving directly behind her with its high beams on. They said they had no doubt that these incidents were an attempt to intimidate them.