

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

Pre-Election Media Coverage

The Centre for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA) reported that a total of 46 television stations broadcast live the pre-election rally of the “United Serbia” coalition held at the Belgrade Arena, at which Aleksandar Vučić, the lead candidate on the coalition’s electoral list and former president of the party and of the country, addressed the audience. CRTA added that the majority of television stations did not indicate that the broadcast constituted election campaign programming, although, under the law, all television stations broadcasting such content are required to do so. Of additional concern is the fact that TV Pink and TV Prva, both national broadcasters, aired the party rally as part of their main news programmes.

Based on its monitoring of the news programmes of RTS, Pink, Prva, B92 and Happy TV during the ongoing pre-election campaign, the Bureau for Social Research (BIRODI) reported that the news programmes on Pink, Prva and B92, rather than providing a space for pluralistic information for voters, have to a significant extent assumed the role of promoting the “Aleksandar Vučić – United Serbia” electoral list. In its statement, BIRODI claimed that there are grounds for the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) to examine possible violations of at least three key provisions of the Rulebook on the Protection of Human Rights in the Provision of Media Services. It stated that Article 4, concerning truthful, objective, comprehensive and diverse information, had been violated, as well as Article 7, concerning objectivity in reporting, and Article 8, concerning the rule of the other side.



BIRODI reported that its Executive Director, Zoran Gavrilović, and the organization itself were mentioned several times on Informer TV in a series of insulting, disparaging and personalized comments in connection with complaints submitted to REM. BIRODI considered it particularly problematic that the regulatory procedure was personalized and turned into a televised confrontation with the complainant.

Rodoljub Šabić, a member of the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM), stated that at its meeting today, the Council decided to initiate proceedings against several television stations that broadcast political propaganda programmes featuring minors. In a comment on the original post on the social media platform X, Šabić stated that, in all cases, minors had been used in support of the "Aleksandar Vučić – United Serbia" electoral list, formed around the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS).

Polling Stations Abroad

The deadline for Serbian citizens living abroad to register to vote in the upcoming elections expired at midnight on October 3, and members of the Republic Electoral Commission (RIK) received a proposal from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the designation of polling stations abroad. David Krstić, a deputy member of RIK representing the "Student List – Students Are Winning" electoral list, said that, according to information from the Commission for the Revision of the Voter Register, at least 100.000 applications from Serbian citizens wishing to vote abroad are expected to be processed, which would represent an increase of almost threefold compared with the previous elections. He added that the ministry's proposal concerning polling stations abroad was "shameful," explaining that the proposal excluded voters, particularly in locations where there is significant interest in voting. As an example, he cited Vancouver, which served as a polling station in the previous elections. He claimed that nearly 1.500 Serbian citizens are currently registered there and that, under the current proposal, they would all have to vote in Ottawa, approximately 3.500 to 4.000 kilometres away. Students and citizens gathered outside RIK in Belgrade and submitted an objection to the decision adopted on the basis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' proposal. The students stated that the decision makes it more difficult for citizens living abroad to exercise their right to vote.

Freedom of Expression

Jovan Kerešić, editor of Radio Dir, was detained by police in Ruma without explanation during a visit to the town by Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) member Aleksandar Vučić. The Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) protested the incident, stating that detaining a journalist without providing an explanation of the reasons for, or circumstances surrounding, his being brought to the police station was unacceptable, particularly while a political event was taking place that Kerešić could have covered in his capacity as a journalist.

Aleksandra Kostić, a reporter for the Glas Šumadije news portal, was verbally attacked and threatened by a middle-aged man while reporting from a gathering of Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) supporters in Kragujevac, prior to their departure for the Belgrade Arena, where the pre-election rally of the "Aleksandar Vučić – United Serbia" electoral list was held. Reporter Aleksandra Kostić wore a clearly visible press identification badge around her neck throughout the incident, with the word "PRESS" prominently displayed.

N1 television reporter Mladen Savatović was subjected to threats on two occasions while carrying out his professional duties in public. The first incident occurred while he was waiting to go live outside the Belgrade City Administration, when an unidentified man threatened him, saying that "his head would be smashed." The second incident involved Momčilo Mandić, the father of Vladimir Mandić, a former handball player and prominent member of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). While Savatović was filming a building suspected of being used for the registration of so-called phantom voters, two older men approached him. One of them attempted to prevent Savatović and his cameraman from filming the building, despite being informed that the location was public property. Mandić insulted and threatened Savatović and then proceeded to physically attack him. Police officers announced that they were on their way, but did not appear at the scene.

Adria News Network (ANN), which operates the Nova.rs news portal, reportedly announced, according to employees, the names of journalists from pro-government media outlets such as Alo and Večernje novosti whom it intended to engage for a period of three months. The Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) stated that the pressure on Nova.rs was part of efforts to establish full control over the media landscape and expressed its full support for the journalists and colleagues at Nova.rs, as well as the editorial teams of N1, Danas and the weekly Radar, which are also facing pressure.



Mejrema Nokić, a journalist for Sto Plus Radio and a correspondent for the Beta news agency, was subjected to intimidation and obstructed in the performance of her professional duties while covering an SNS rally in Novi Pazar and reporting in the public interest. Nokić emphasized that she was wearing a vest clearly marked "PRESS" and was standing in a public area. She was followed and conspicuously filmed by Dejan Belojica, director of the Novi Pazar Tourism Organization, which made her feel uncomfortable and intimidated. Shortly afterwards, a young man whom she knows to be a member of the security services approached her and told her to leave, stating that they, referring to SNS officials, considered journalists filming them to be an act of provocation.

ANEM warned that a list entitled "Checking Blockaders - Čačak," containing citizens' personal data, including that of journalists, was being distributed in Čačak. The organization called for an urgent response from the relevant authorities, stating that the list constituted violations of several laws and posed a threat to the safety of journalists. Those identified as "blockaders" were predominantly students, education workers, citizens who had recently acquired voting rights, opposition representatives, activists and journalists. In the "VDV status" column next to citizens' names, entries included labels such as "certain," "member," "undecided," "does not vote," and "against."

The Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) protested after Kristina Demeter Filipčev, a journalist for the Bečejski mozaik news portal, was prevented from covering the visit of Aleksandar Vučić, the lead candidate of the "United Serbia" electoral list, to Bačko Gradište. Three men prevented her from reporting from the gathering. Two of them identified themselves as police officers, while the third did not identify himself.

Aleksandar Vučić, now campaigning in his capacity as an ordinary citizen, accused N1 and Nova television of lying and of inciting violence in society. Government representatives have for some time been continuously targeting journalists working for N1 and Nova. When it comes to protecting journalists at these television stations, these days it is primarily journalists themselves who are supporting one another, while journalists' associations have also spoken out in their defense. The company that acquired these media outlets has not officially responded, nor has it taken a public stance in defense of N1 journalists.

There has been a noticeable increase in various forms of pressure and repression against journalists and media outlets, particularly as the elections approach and the pre-election atmosphere in Serbia becomes increasingly tense. Preventing journalists from carrying out their professional duties with dignity, as well as subjecting them to violence and pressure, are unacceptable forms of conduct on the part of the ruling authorities and their supporters.

Freedom of Association

A student was attacked with a grass scythe while taking part in a door-to-door campaign in the municipality of Grocka. According to the students' account, they properly identified themselves to the man who answered the door. They said that he told them he knew who they were and that he had worked at the University for 30 years, before pushing one of the students. He then took a grass scythe and cut the student with it. The student suffered a cut to his hand and was taken to the Emergency Centre for stitches. Municipal President Rajković, despite not having witnessed the incident, recounted a version of events without explaining how he knew the details of the confrontation. According to his account, activists from the Students' List were the first to attack the man, allegedly striking him in the head, after which he took a sickle from his apartment, with which one of the canvassers subsequently "injured himself."

Law student Petar Živković stated at a press conference held by the Students' List that, during the night of 3-4 October, after being followed for two weeks by certain individuals, he saw Marko Kričko, head of the Criminal Police Directorate (UKP), in front of his apartment building. That evening, when Živković was returning home from the student headquarters at around 12:30 a.m., he noticed three or four high-end vehicles parked directly in front of his building, with around ten people standing next to them, among whom was the head of the UKP.

Freedom of Assembly

Two parallel gatherings were held simultaneously in Konjarnik: one organized by SNS supporters and the other by citizens gathered around the Konjarnik Assembly (Zbor Konjarnik), who support the Students' List. Police were present throughout the day due to tensions and verbal disputes between the two groups. One woman supporting the Students' List took a flag from SNS supporters, which led to another incident.