



Shadow Report

State of Democracy in Serbia **2022**



EU-RS THINK TANK

Editor:
Nemanja Todorović Štiplija

Authors:
Aleksandar Ivković, Emina Muminović, Sofija Popović,
Nikola Burazer

Assistants:
Aleksandra Marković, Anđela Šemić

Design and prepress:
Bratislav Bojić

Photo:
FoNet

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Introduction

The document before us is a regular annual shadow report on the state of democracy in Serbia, the sixth in a row report published by the Centre for Contemporary Politics. Since we began publishing these reports, with the first one covering the period from October 2016, every year a minor or major decline in the quality of democratic institutions has been evident. Although the reports of the Centre for Contemporary Politics on the state of democracy in Serbia do not themselves contain quantitative assessments, and therefore do not allow for direct comparison, the reports contain clear quantitative data, as well as other indicators on the basis of which a conclusion can be drawn about democratic backsliding in the country.

In the previous report, which covered the period from October 2020 to September 2021 - the period in which the parliament was without opposition after the boycott of the 2020 elections, and the government and the opposition held two parallel dialogues on electoral conditions, it could be seen that no significant improvements that could be expected after the sharp reaction of various institutions of the European Union to the quality of the electoral process took place, but also the evident stalemate in Serbia's EU accession process in the two-year period from the end of 2019, which was caused by democratic backsliding in the country.

In this report, which covers the period from October 2021 to September 2022, quite divergent processes can be seen that make it difficult to draw a simple conclusion. On the one hand, after the parliamentary elections in April 2022, the opposition returned to the parliament and then later showed a serious intention to fight for its ideas through this institution. The government made certain concessions to the opposition when it comes to the election of the vice-president of the National Assembly, as well as the presidents of the parliamentary committees. Progress was also seen in the EU integration process itself with the opening of a new cluster in December 2021, thanks to the implementation of the necessary constitutional changes.

On the other hand, certain worrisome tendencies continued. The government seriously endangered citizens' right to peaceful assembly by intimidation and tolerating violence in November and December 2021 at protests against the opening of a lithium mine in western Serbia, on which occasion a serious propaganda machine was launched against the demonstrators that could easily have led to a larger-scale conflict. The complications regarding the ban on the Europride walk in September 2022 also represent a very worrisome threat to the right to assembly.

The phenomenon of media capture became even more pronounced after the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM) decided to reassign national frequencies to the same pro-government television stations, which not only violated all possible norms of objective and impartial reporting, but also, based on data from REM itself, regulations for national broadcasters.

Finally, even evident progress in political pluralism did not come as a consequence of the success of inter-party dialogues and the improvement of electoral conditions. In certain respects, the 2022 elections represent perhaps the most controversial elections of the last twenty years, although their quality is pushed into the background when the focus is placed solely on the question of restoring a representative and functional parliament. Thanks to the multiple repetitions of elections at one polling station, it took 93 days from the day of the parliamentary elections to determine the final results, which is an unprecedented case.

Democracy and European integration

European integration is a strategic goal of the Serbian government, which is persistently trying to present its results as significant successes on the way to membership in the European Union. However, the absence of opening new chapters due to problems with the rule of law and democracy from December 2019 to December 2021 showed that the Government's performance in this regard was quite problematic. A step forward was made in December 2021 with the initiation of important constitutional changes, but further progress will require much more than that.

Democracy is one of the political Copenhagen criteria - adopted at the meeting of the European Council in 1993 - which countries must fulfill in order to become members of the European Union. Other political criteria are the rule of law and the protection of human and minority rights, while the economic criteria refer to the existence and functionality of the market economy.

“Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities”. Conclusions of the Presidency - Copenhagen, June 21-22 1993.

What the European Union means by democracy in its reports - elections, work of the parliament, governance and civil society - remains outside the negotiation chapters, and therefore often outside the public discourse on European integration. These topics,

however, are of great importance for the success of this process, and according to the new methodology of accession negotiations adopted in March 2020, they are located together with chapters 23 and 24 in the cluster related to fundamental issues.

About the *State of Democracy in Serbia 2022* report

The State of Democracy in Serbia 2022 is a shadow report for the fields covered by the topics of democracy in the European Commission's reports for Serbia: elections, parliament, governance and civil society - as well as media freedom, which, although it does not belong to the field of democracy in these reports, is strongly connected with these issues and it also previously stood separately from the negotiation chapters, in the part that concerned the political Copenhagen criteria.

The State of Democracy in Serbia 2022 report covers the period from October 2021 to September 2022. It is the sixth annual shadow report on the state of democracy in Serbia published by the Centre for Contemporary Politics / European Western Balkans.

1. Elections

Regular elections for the President of Serbia and snap elections for members of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia were held on 3 April 2022. On the same day, several regular and snap elections for councillors in local self-government assemblies were held, including the city of Belgrade. Elections at different levels were again held on the same day, thus continuing a long-standing practice in Serbia that negatively affects the development of local democracy.

The president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, announced in October 2020 that snap parliamentary elections would be held no later than 3 April 2022. Previously, a non-representative parliament was constituted in which the Government was supported by 243 out of 250 MPs¹.

Apart from the announcement of snap parliamentary elections, another process that marked the continuation of the political crisis in Serbia was the second phase of the inter-party dialogue between the government and the opposition with the mediation of the European Parliament. Although, unlike the first phase of the inter-party dialogue, all opposition actors participated in the meetings held in person in Belgrade in July and September 2021, **there are no indicators that the second phase of the inter-party dialogue significantly improved the electoral conditions in Serbia**. After 16 measures to improve electoral conditions were announced on 18 September 2021, which were compiled by co-facilitators² from the National Assembly and the European Parliament, part of the opposition parties refused to participate in their implementation, evaluating them as insufficient³. Suggestions from separate platforms, prepared by several groups of opposition parties, were largely absent from the measures proposed by the co-facilitators.

By the start of the election campaign in February 2022, 14 of the 16 proposed measures had been implemented, with a significant delay in the implementation of the measures for which deadlines were set⁴. The measures included the specification of provisions in several electoral laws, expansion of the line-up of the Republic Electoral Commission

1 N1: "Vučić: Vanredni parlamentarni izbori najkasnije 3. aprila 2022", <https://bit.ly/3SC1bVg>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

2 The official term used by representatives of the European Union. The term "intermediaries" was often used in the media.

3 EWB: "Inter-Party Dialogue in Serbia produces 16 measures, negative reaction of the opposition", <https://bit.ly/3CddL84>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

4 EWB: "Delays and criticism cast shadow over EU's initial positive assessments of the Inter-Party Dialogue in Serbia", <https://bit.ly/3DVF6s6y>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

(REC) and the establishment of the Temporary Supervisory Body for monitoring the media during the campaign. The Temporary Supervisory Body had no executive powers and its work was not visible during the campaign, and half of its members were representatives of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media (REM), which was not trusted by the opposition. Measures aimed at preventing pressure on voters and official campaigns did not produce visible results.

In the parliamentary elections of 2020, great controversy was caused by the collection of the necessary signatures of support for electoral lists, with indications that as many as 8 out of 21 lists collected signatures in a suspicious manner, with the potential misuse of citizens' personal data⁵. This practice raised suspicions that the signatures were collected with the help of the ruling parties in order to ensure the illusion of political pluralism. In the 2022 elections, the researchers concluded that illogicalities appeared again when it comes to the six electoral lists that verified more signatures in certain municipal administrations than they had votes in the same municipalities⁶. These cases have not received a clear epilogue either in 2020 or this year.

According to the findings of the mission of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE (ODIHR), which observed the elections together with the mission of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, all participants in the presidential and parliamentary elections had access to televisions with national coverage during the campaign, but the current president and the ruling party were once again at an advantage as the *televisions uncritically broadcast their regular activities which often took the form of campaigns*⁷. According to the findings of the OSCE, the regular (outside electoral campaigns) news programs of private national televisions covered the President and the Government as much as 90% of the time, while that percentage was 73% on Radio-Television of Serbia. Out of ten daily newspapers whose coverage was monitored by the OSCE mission, only two (*Danas* and *Nova*) reported critically on the ruling parties.

Research by the Center for Contemporary Politics showed that the current president, Aleksandar Vučić, who was a candidate for a second term, was present as a guest for 11 hours and 38 minutes on television with national coverage during March 2022 (excluding reporting on his activities). The presence of the second-place candidate Zdravko Ponoš amounts to 1 hour and 24 minutes in the same period.

5 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Serbian Election 2020, p. 5, <https://bit.ly/3CjS32d>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

6 Stojanović et al. Final report on the abuse of signature verification: Monitoring the candidacy process in the 2022 elections in Serbia, National Coalition for Decentralization, unpublished research.

7 OSCE: the Republic of Serbia - presidential and snap parliamentary elections on April 3, 2022. ODIHR election observation mission. Final report. <https://bit.ly/3dEjHNX>, pp. 22-23, accessed on 28.09.2022.

Additionally, research by the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (Crta) showed that in the period leading up to the election campaign (from October 2021 to February 2022) pluralism in the media with national coverage was “almost non-existent”⁸, which indicates that the opposition, as in previous election cycles, got the opportunity to address the widest circle of voters only in the last few weeks before the elections, after the official start of the election campaign.

Both the OSCE mission and the Crta mission noted the presence of pressure on voters in this election cycle as well. The OSCE stated that “the pressure on voters to support the current and ruling coalition and the abuse of administrative resources by state and municipal actors before the elections made the border between the state and the party unclear, contrary to OSCE obligations and international good practice”⁹. On the other hand, based on information collected from more than 50 hours of interviews with victims or witnesses of pressure from almost 30 cities in Serbia, the Monitoring Mission of Crta concluded that those most exposed to pressure are employees in the public sector, as well as minorities and socio-economically vulnerable groups, and above all the citizens of Roma nationality¹⁰.

It can be concluded **that the same activities that made the previous cycles unequal also appeared in these elections**: media dominance of the ruling parties before the official campaign, blurring the line between party and public office, and pressure on voters. In that sense, there are no indications of improving the democracy of elections in Serbia in this report as well.

In addition, **what marked the 2020 elections and was not present in previous cycles happened again in 2022 - the problem of determining the election results**. First, the Republic Electoral Commission (RIK) decided not to publish the preliminary results of the presidential elections and the elections for the National Assembly the same night the polling stations were closed, but did so the following night¹¹. Although this did not violate the law, this action was not in accordance with the previous practice of the RIK, and caused negative reactions from participants and observers, who assessed that this decision damaged trust

8 CRTA: Second preliminary report of long-term observers, <https://bit.ly/3UOMq2Y>, p. 4, accessed on 28.09.2022.

9 OSCE: the Republic of Serbia - presidential and snap parliamentary elections on April 3, 2022. ODIHR election observation mission. Final report. <https://bit.ly/3dEjHnX>, p. 14, accessed on 28.09.2022.

10 CRTA: Second preliminary report of long-term observers, <https://bit.ly/3UOMq2Y>, p. 3, accessed on 28.09.2022.

11 Insajder: “Umesto RIK-a, preliminarne rezultate izbora saopštili CeSID/IPSOS i Aleksandar Vučić”, <https://bit.ly/3E1qThR>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

in the electoral process¹². During the night of April 3 and the following day, citizens could follow the counting of votes on RIK's website.

Voting was invalidated due to irregularities in a total of 77 polling stations for the presidential and parliamentary elections and repeated on April 16. Although less than in 2020, when 234 polling stations were invalidated, this still represents a significantly higher number compared to previous election cycles, and is an additional reason for doubting the work of the election administration.

A special problem with the transparency of elections was related to local elections in the city of Belgrade. A day after the elections were held, the City Election Commission (GIK) announced the results based on only 88% of the votes counted. It remained unclear why the remaining votes were not included in the results (excluding the six polling stations that were invalidated due to irregularities). Based on these results, the previous ruling coalition of the SNS and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) had a minimal majority of 56 seats.

By the decision of GIK voting was repeated in four polling stations on April 16 and two more on April 21. However, as the public found out on April 21, nine days earlier, GIK counted 99% of the votes, based on which SNS and SPS had only 55 mandates. However, the public was not informed of these results¹³. *This means that voters participated in repeated elections without full knowledge of the election results and the potential impact of their vote.* This non-transparency indicates a serious manipulation of the work of the election administration and is a step backwards when it comes to the credibility of the election process in Serbia.

Another controversy that marked these elections was the five-fold repetition of voting at the polling station in Veliki Trnovac, in the municipality of Bujanovac. The voting was declared invalid four times due to procedural defects, and a month passed between two votes due to legal changes before the elections extended the deadlines for appeals and increased the number of instances to which appeals can be filed. **Due to repeated voting at this polling station, the final results of the parliamentary elections were determined only on 5 July 2022, 93 days after the election day on 3 April, which is an unprecedented case.**

Aleksandar Vučić, who was supported by the coalition partner in the presidential elections – SPS, was convincingly re-elected as President of the Republic, winning the first round with 58.59% of the votes. Runner-up Zdravko Ponoš, a non-party candidate, supported by the largest opposition coalition, won 18.39% of the votes.

12 OSCE: the Republic of Serbia - presidential and snap parliamentary elections on April 3, 2022. ODIHR election observation mission. Final report. <https://bit.ly/3dEjHnX>, p. 29, accessed on 28.09.2022.

13 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Serbian Election 2020, p. 10, <https://bit.ly/3SsBIOo>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

On the other hand, SNS recorded a loss of votes for the first time since coming to power in 2012. The SNS list finished the elections in the first place, with 42.96% of the votes, but for the first time since 2014, it did not win an absolute majority of MPs. The opposition coalition United for the Victory of Serbia, composed of parties of the centre-left and right, won 13.67% of the votes, and the list of the ruling SPS won 11.43%. Four more opposition lists entered the National Assembly, which won a single-digit percentage of votes, as well as five lists of national minorities. Pro-Russian opposition lists attracted special attention, three of which entered the parliament. Most commentators attributed their growth to the war in Ukraine and the traditionally pro-Russian public opinion in Serbia.¹⁴

The final results in the City of Belgrade gave the minimal majority of 56 MPs to the previous ruling coalition of SNS and SPS, which was joined by one opposition councillor in forming the majority. The candidate of the Serbian Progressive Party, Aleksandar Šapić, was elected mayor.

Since the end of the elections, several senior SNS officials have mentioned the possibility of snap parliamentary elections¹⁵. In August, President Vučić, while awarding the mandate for the composition of the new government to Ana Brnabić, stated that she would not be the Prime Minister for the full four years, but did not specify whether there would be a reconstruction of the government or snap elections¹⁶. Holding snap elections even though the government has stable support in the parliament, as was the case in 2014 and 2016, represents a problematic element of the SNS rule from the point of view of the stability and independence of the parliament.

14 RSE: "Novi početak za desnicu u Srbiji", <https://bit.ly/3fsbtIW>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

15 Danas: "Vučević: Zamoliću Vučića da budu novi parlamentarni izbori kad su građani videli lažnu desnicu", <https://bit.ly/3ChErUX>, accessed on 28.09.2022; N1: "Vučić: Protiv vanrednih parlamentarnih izbora, sastaju se sa Đilasom", <https://bit.ly/3dMlhfB> accessed on 28.09.2022.

16 Euronews: "Vučić: Ana Brnabić mandatar nove Vlade Srbije, ali ne cele četiri godine, važne funkcije Vučeviću i Dačiću", <https://bit.ly/3SALFJ0>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

2. Parliament

In the reporting period, the highly problematic trend of parliamentary inactivity continued. Since the National Assembly was dissolved in March 2020, Serbia had gone through several periods of several months when there was no parliament capable of full and smooth functioning. Out of a total of 1096 days in 2020, 2021 and 2022, the parliament was inactive for 416 days, i.e., almost 40% of the total time (see table). This effect was achieved in 2020 by exhausting the constitutional deadlines for the formation of the parliament and the government almost to the very end, for no objective reason, and in 2022 with repeated elections in Veliki Trnovac, and then another exhausting of almost the entire 30-day deadline for the constitution of the parliament.

Periods of parliamentary inactivity	Circumstances	Number of days
March 4, 2020 - April 28, 2020	The state of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic	56
May 10, 2020 - October 22, 2020.	Snap parliamentary elections, exhaustion of constitutional deadlines	185
February 15, 2022 - August 1, 2022	Snap parliamentary elections, exhaustion of constitutional deadlines	175

During the constitutive session of the new convocation of the National Assembly, held on August 1, 2022, for the first time since December 2018, almost all relevant political actors participated in its work. At the beginning of 2019, the opposition started boycotting the sessions, which lasted until the end of the parliament's mandate in 2020, when the convocation was elected practically without opposition. Such a long period of absence of an active, representative parliament caused serious damage to the development of democratic institutions in Serbia.

During the constitution of the new convocation of the National Assembly, **indicators suggesting that it could become a place for constructive dialogue and more active participation of the opposition appeared.** Representatives of opposition parties received more positions of president and deputy president of parliamentary committees and parliamentary delegations than in the Eleventh convocation (from 2016 to 2020). Three members of the opposition were elected as vice-presidents of the National Assembly (seven vice-presidents in total). Vladimir Orlić from the Serbian Progressive Party was elected President of the National Assembly. Until the conclusion of the report, several

parliamentary groups of the opposition announced various initiatives, such as draft laws, declarations and other decisions, which indicates their intention to actively participate in the work of the parliament.

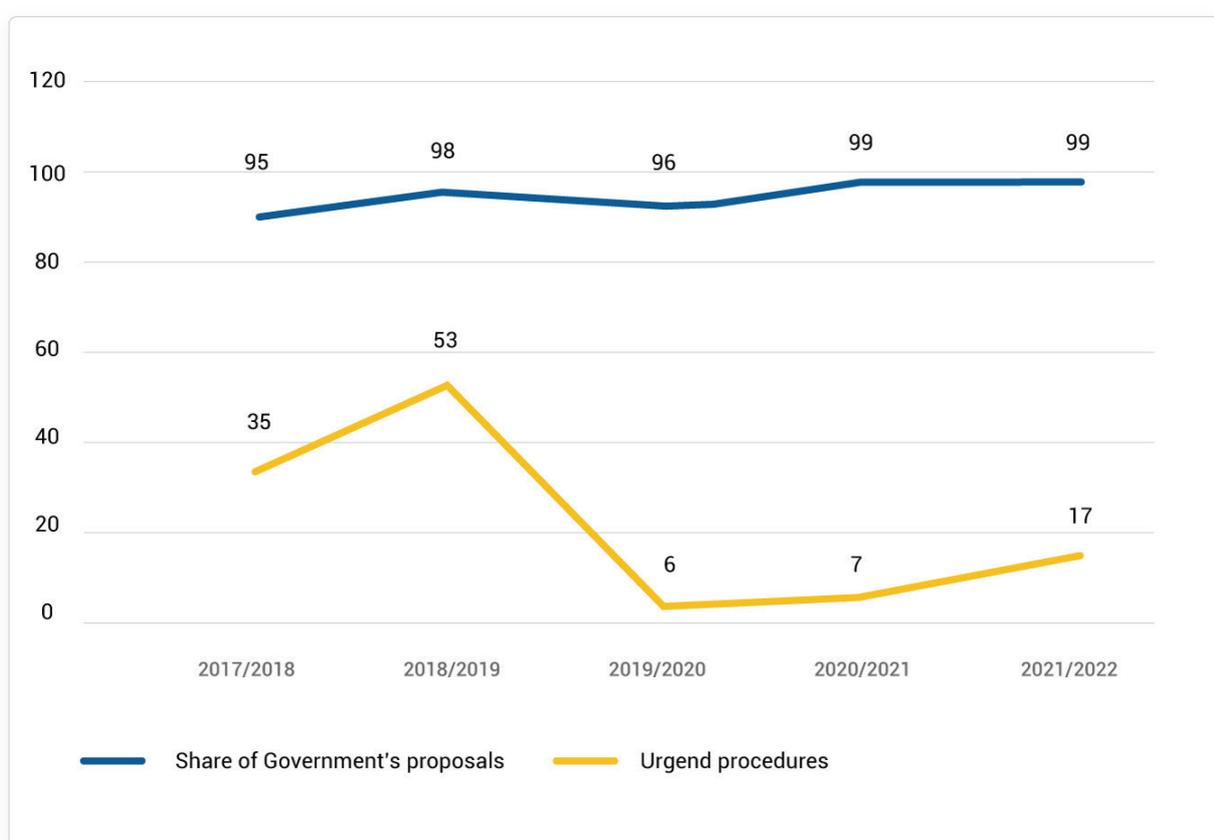
However, less than two months after the constitution of the parliament, negative signals about its future work also appeared. On September 28, 2022, members of the largest parliamentary group "Aleksandar Vučić - Zajedno možemo sve" submitted 21 proposals for the establishment of Inquiry Committees on the actions and statements of individual members of the opposition. The objectives of the proposed committees are formulated in a distinctly populist or absurd manner (for example, "The Inquiry Committee for determination of facts and circumstances regarding bringing a cabbage stone into the National Assembly"), with an obvious intention of disrupting the work of the Parliament¹⁷.

This procedure raised doubts that the negative practices that characterized the Eleventh Convocation, which the opposition cited as reasons for the boycott, **will reappear in this convocation of the National Assembly.** Among other things, they included the submission of hundreds of amendments to the proposals of the Budget Law with the aim of limiting the opposition's time for discussion, the excessive use of the emergency procedure in the adoption of the law, as well as not holding of sessions scheduled for parliamentary questions to the government.

Year	Number of points on the agenda	Point of the Draft Budget Law	Number of amendments discussed before the Draft Budget Law	Total number of speeches on the amendments to the Draft Budget Law	Number of speeches of opposition MPs	Days of the reading of the Draft Budget Law
2014.	12	2	5	155	108	1
2015.	12	5	0	215	140	2
2016.	7	6	0	265	188	2
2017.	31	6	265	30	24	1
2018.	62	4	302	4	3	1
2019.	1	1	0	157	21	3
2020.	10	1	0	42	5	1
2021.	17	1	0	3	0	1

¹⁷ National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia: Acts in procedure, <https://bit.ly/3LPyFgx>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

These tendencies mostly disappeared *after* the opposition joined the boycott, which can be seen in the example of the adoption of the Budget Law. In 2021, it was adopted within the stipulated period, with an almost complete absence of detailed discussion (about the submitted amendments)¹⁸, which represents a contrast with the situation in 2017 and 2018, when there were hundreds of amendments and addresses from government representatives. Also, in this reporting period as well, which covers the period from October 2021 to September 2022, the government proposed almost all laws adopted by the National Assembly¹⁹. The percentage of laws adopted under the emergency procedure also increased²⁰, but it is still at a lower level than in the 2017-2019 period.



The long period of parliamentary inactivity also affected the control of the executive branch, which in recent years has been highly formalistic. However, even that aspect was lost in the reporting period due to the fact that the last session devoted to parliamentary questions for members of the Government was held in November 2021. In the reporting period, this

¹⁸ Open Parliament: Seventh Session of the Second Regular Session 23. 11. 2021. <https://bit.ly/3dQ1exP>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

¹⁹ Open Parliament: Acts, <https://bit.ly/3SHsD3W>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

²⁰ Ibid.

kind of session was held only in October of the same year, only to be skipped in December, as well as in January 2022²¹. From February of that year, the parliament was dissolved until August, so this activity could not be carried out.

Month	Members of Government present	PM present	How many MPs asked a question?	How many opposition MPs?
October 2021	Yes	No	5	1
November 2021	Yes	Yes	8	1
December 2021	No	/	/	/
January 2022	No	/	/	/
February 2022	No (Parliament Dissolved)	/	/	/
March 2022	No (Parliament Dissolved)	/	/	/
April 2022	No (Parliament Dissolved)	/	/	/
May 2022	No (Parliament Dissolved)	/	/	/
June 2022	No (Parliament Dissolved)			
July 2022	No (Parliament Dissolved)			
August 2022	No			

On the last day of its work in the calendar year 2021, the National Assembly discussed the reports of independent institutions (Agency for Prevention of Corruption, Protector of Citizens, Commissioner for Equality and Commissioner for Free Access to Information and Protection of Personal Data)²². This practice was renewed in 2020, and before that, it was absent for many years.

²¹ National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia: Archive of activities, <https://bit.ly/3UMJzYr>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

²² National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia: Calendar of activities, <https://bit.ly/3dRGhmc>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

3. Governance

Serbia's accession to the European Union remained the main foreign policy priority. However, the Government's decision not to align with the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU when it comes to the relationship with Russia, as well as the anti-European statements of high state officials, further opened up space for concrete action by third parties and called into question the country's European perspective. In parallel with that, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of citizens opposed to Serbia's accession to the European Union.

The capacities for coordination and implementation of the European integration process are significantly reduced because since the end of January and the election campaign for the parliamentary elections, there have been almost no reforms. In mid-February, a convocation of the National Assembly was dissolved. The new one was only formed on 3 August, due to the delay of the end of the election process, and from then until the end of the observed reporting period, the Government is under a technical mandate.

Even after more than a hundred days after the Republic Election Commission (REC) announced the election results and three months after the parliamentary elections ended, the ruling majority has still not been formed. It is assumed that the old ruling coalition will form the new ruling majority gathered around the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), which holds 63.2% of the seats in the parliament.

The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, announced that the current Prime Minister Ana Brnabić would be the representative for the composition of the new Government and that after two years, the current Mayor of Novi Sad, Miloš Vučević, could become the prime minister.²³ Thus, for the second time, the president of Serbia and the SNS, even before the government was formed, talks about its duration and potential new parliamentary elections.²⁴

After five years of delay, in the reporting period Serbia took a step forward in the process of amending the Constitution of the Republic in part related to the judiciary, which is necessary to harmonize with the legislation of the European Union. The entire process of writing and voting on constitutional amendments in the National Assembly was expressed.

The Assembly received the first opinion on the draft text from the Venice Commission on

²³ N1: Ana Brnabić mandatar za sastav nove vlade, <https://bit.ly/3LVuSOW>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

²⁴ Al Džazira: Vučić pominje nove izbore još ni vladu nije sastavio, <https://bit.ly/3dSyoNa>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

18 October. On 29 November, the National Assembly subsequently adopted the Act on Amendments to the Constitution in part related to the independent judiciary.²⁵

The referendum held on 16 January showed that 59.62% of citizens supported the constitutional changes, while 39.35% were against it.²⁶ Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić announced the referendum results before the competent Republic Election Commission (RIK).²⁷

On the eve of the referendum, the authorities decided to change the Law on Referendum and People's Initiative. According to the new provisions, the referendum's success does not require half of the total number of voters but over 50% of the number of voters. Out of 6,510,323 registered voters, only 1,995,215 took part in the referendum on Constitutional changes.

The low turnout is also a consequence of the constitutional changes being under the public's radar since there was almost no referendum campaign. Thus, the question of changing the Constitution, as a necessary step on Serbia's path to the EU, divided the profession and politicians. At the same time, citizens were poorly informed about what exactly they were voting on.²⁸ The actual effects of the changes will be visible after adopting a set of judicial laws that will further elaborate the constitutional solutions.

Independent institutions

This section offers an analysis of changes in authority, organization, as well as personnel changes of autonomous and independent state bodies, which could impact their position and work. It also shows some of the actions of these institutions in cases of special importance for the state of democracy in Serbia.

Amendments to relevant laws

On 3 November 2021, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Law on the Ombudsman and the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, which regulates the work of the Commissioner for Free Access to Information and Personal Data

25 FES: Serbia's progress in EU integration 2020-2022, <https://bit.ly/3y0Da24>, accessed on 28. septembra 2022.

26 RTS: Republička izborna komisija (RIK) saopštila konačne rezultate referenduma, <https://bit.ly/3reipwb>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

27 RTS: Vučić: Više od 60 odsto glasalo "da" na referendumu, <https://bit.ly/3fsSpdP>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

28 EWB: Promena Ustava podelila struku i političare, građani ostali slabo obavješteni o čemu su glasali, <https://bit.ly/3rhpfqfy>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

Protection²⁹. Both laws were adopted based on the commitments from the Action Plan for Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights.³⁰

After a multiyear process of amending the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, which was accompanied by controversial proposals and solutions, the proposal that the Government officially sent to the National Assembly in October 2021 represented an improved version compared to the previous ones. According to the assessment of the PrEUgovor Coalition, in the end, it turned out that “the willingness to accept the proposals that came from civil society was still higher than during the adoption of many other important regulations during the last few years”.³¹ Some of the most problematic solutions that came up in the previous proposals of the new Law, which were also discussed in the previous editions of the State of Democracy in Serbia, have been removed, while solutions that open up space for more efficient work of the Commissioner have been adopted.

Among the problematic changes that remained in the final text of the Law is the inclusion of the National Bank in the circle of authorities against which it is not possible to submit a complaint to the Commissioner (this group includes, among others, the President of the Republic and the Government). Two new grounds were also introduced for denying the right to access to information of public importance - violation of the right to intellectual and industrial property and endangering the environment. The PrEUgovor coalition added that this solution, despite the improvements, still does not solve numerous other problems pointed out by civil society in the public debate.³²

The new Law on the Ombudsman formally extended the activities of this institution to the fields of rights of persons with disabilities and the fight against human trafficking. The evaluations of one part of civil society stated that the new Law still does not ensure the political independence of the Protector of Citizens, since it stipulates that, despite the tender, only parliamentary groups in the National Assembly have the right to formally propose a candidate to the competent parliamentary committee, and the candidate has the right to be a member of a political party until elected.³³

In their annual reports for 2021, both the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance

29 National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia: Passed laws, <https://bit.ly/3y0AXDJ>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

30 Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Serbia: Action Plan for Chapter 23, <https://bit.ly/3Sw5sJI>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

31 PrEUgovor: Report of the coalition PrEUgovor on the progress of Serbia in cluster 1 - May 2022. <https://bit.ly/3fqsK5o>, p. 69, accessed on 28.09.2022.

32 Ibid, p. 70

33 PrEUgovor: “Predlog zakona o Zaštitniku građana neće obezbediti veću nezavisnost ni efikasnost ove institucije”, <https://bit.ly/3Rjl3v5>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

and the Protection of Personal Data and the Protector of Citizens positively assessed the legal changes governing the functioning of these institutions.

Institutions' personnel

In this reporting period, there were no changes in the personnel of the observed independent institutions. The five-year mandate of Zoran Pašalić as the Protector of Citizens was extended for another three years by the adoption of amendments to the Law on the Protector of Citizens.

First of all, it is noticeable, that some of the previous controversies in this area have not been resolved. The civil society's long-standing complaint that allegations about the former membership and activities of the director of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, Dragan Sikimić, in the ruling SNS³⁴ were not investigated, has still not produced any effect. The same applies to Fiscal Council member Bojan Dimitrijević, whose election in December 2020 also attracted attention due to the fact that he is a former member of the SNS.

In addition, the Government did not elect new members of its expert advisory body - the Council for the fight against corruption. After the death of Jelisaveta Vasilić in June 2021, the Council had six members out of thirteen. The maximum number of members has never been reached since 2012.

Actions of independent institutions

During the reporting period, the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption played a significant role in holding elections both at the national and local levels. Observers assessed that the Agency did not respond adequately to cases in which public officials abused their position by leading a campaign in favour of the ruling party.³⁵

The final report of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE stated that the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption did not effectively respond to most of the alleged violations of the provisions on election financing.³⁶

Regarding the environmental protests in Serbia in November and December 2021 the Protector of Citizens invited all citizens who believe that their human rights have been

³⁴ Danas: "Sikimić bio član SNS u vreme izbora na čelo Agencije?", <https://bit.ly/3LPNnUN>, accessed on 29.09.2022.

³⁵ PrEUgovor: Report of the coalition PrEUgovor on the progress of Serbia in cluster 1 - May 2022. <https://bit.ly/3fqsk5o>, p. 16, accessed on 28.09.2022.

³⁶ OSCE: the Republic of Serbia - presidential and snap parliamentary elections on April 3, 2022. ODIHR election observation mission. Final report <https://bit.ly/3dEjHnX>, p. 3, accessed on 28.09.2022.

violated to contact him.³⁷ He also appealed to citizens who resorted to roadblocks during the protest to express their right to assembly in accordance with the Law on Public Assembly. There is no information on the website of the Protector of Citizens about control procedures for members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, although videos have appeared in the public that indicate excessive use of force, as well as untimely reactions.

37 Protector of Citizens: The Protector of Citizens invited citizens to contact him regarding violations of rights during blockades, <https://bit.ly/3CcvyuT>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

4. Civil society

The space for activities of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Serbia remains unfavourable. Despite some improvements on paper, the trend of narrowing their activities continues, as well as pressure, intimidation and verbal attacks directed at activists and members of non-governmental organizations.

The absence of significant changes is also confirmed by the evaluation recorded during the reporting period by the international network of civil society organizations - CIVICUS. According to the latest assessments of this organization, the space for the activities of civil society organizations in Serbia has remained "hindered"³⁸, and Serbia is still in the category of countries where the authorities have challenged the actions of CSOs through legal and practical restrictions.³⁹

During the reporting period, the regular meetings of the Prime Minister of Serbia and government representatives with civil society organizations continued. However, effective cooperation was again absent. Numerous meetings did not affect the attitude of state institutions and officials toward civil society activists, so the culture of dialogue in Serbia did not improve.⁴⁰

Adequate cooperation was also absent during the adoption of the Strategy for creating a stimulating environment for the development of civil society for the period 2022-2030 years. The Strategy developed by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue was adopted by the Government of Serbia in February 2022, while prominent civil society organizations refused to participate. The refusal was due to the lack of trust in CSOs and the attitude that the Strategy is only a cover-up of the real situation in which civil society functions in Serbia alongside undermining their work and intimidation.⁴¹ The adopted Strategy omits some of the key problems of civil society in its text, especially in the chapter that concerns the description of the current situation and key challenges in creating a stimulating environment for the development of civil society.⁴²

Attacks and intimidation of activists and CSOs continued during the reporting period.

38 Civicus Rating for Serbia, last update on 11. 08.2022. <https://bit.ly/3CDrFgN>, accessed on 29.09.2022.

39 *Ibid*

40 prEUgovor: Report of the coalition prEUgovor on the progress of Serbia in Cluster 1 - May 2022, <https://bit.ly/3fqsk5o> accessed on 28.09.2022

41 Građanske inicijative: I dalje bez uslova za učešće OCD u izradi Strategije za podsticajno okruženje za civilno društvo, <https://bit.ly/3BWms57>, accessed on 28.09. 2022

42 EWB: Neizvesna sudbina Ministarstva za ljudska i manjinska prava i društveni dijalog, <https://bit.ly/3LR26P8>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

According to the data provided by the Informant on attacks and pressures on “Solidarity for the Rights of All” activists, seventeen attacks on human rights activists and defenders have been registered from October to December 2021 alone, and twenty-two attacks have been recorded since the beginning of 2022.⁴³

Some of the attacks took place during protests to remove the Ratko Mladic mural in the center of Belgrade.⁴⁴ After the demonstration, the offices’ of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) and Women in Black were marred.⁴⁵

Civil society organizations also pointed to concerns about the police response during environmental protests against lithium mining organized across Serbia on several occasions since November 2021. During road blockades, excessive use of force was observed, as well as the threats of the Minister of the Interior to the protesters.⁴⁶ In addition, as a form of intimidation, after the end of the protest, over 600 citizens received misdemeanor charges for participating in the blockades.⁴⁷ The participants and organizers of the rally were labelled as foreign mercenaries, while the Prime Minister of Serbia accused several international organizations of organizing “environmental and opposition protests in Serbia”.⁴⁸

The threat to the freedom of assembly was also observed during the organization of the Pride march as part of EuroPride. Following the President of Serbia’s recommendation, the Ministry of Internal Affairs banned the protest scheduled for 17 September due to “security reasons”. Such a decision of the MUP contradicts the Law on Freedom of Assembly but also the verdict of the Constitutional Court of Serbia, which characterized earlier cancellations of the march due to security reasons as unconstitutional.

Verbal attacks on civil society organizations continued. The decision of the Working Group for Chapter 23 of the National Convention on the EU (NKEU) not to participate in the debate on the referendum on constitutional changes was criticized by the Prime Minister of Serbia,

43 YUCOM: “Solidarno za prava svih - Informator o napadima i pritiscima na aktiviste i aktivistkinje, <https://bit.ly/3riyG3e>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

44 Al Džazira: Protest podrške aktivistkinjama koje su jajima gađale mural Mladića u Beogradu, <https://bit.ly/3SFcrLv>, accessed on 28.09.2022

45 RSE: Prostorije Žena u crnom ponovo išarane grafitima podrške Ratku Mladiću, <https://bit.ly/3SpQiG4>, accessed on 28.09.2022

46 PrEUgovor: Izveštaj koalicije prEUgovor o napretku Srbije u klasteru 1 - maj, <https://bit.ly/3fqsk5o>, accessed on 28.09.2022

47 *Ibid.*

48 RSE: Međunarodne organizacije odbacuju navode premijerke da finansiraju proteste u Srbiji, <https://bit.ly/3fnR9Zn>, accessed 28 september 2022.

Ana Brnabić, stating that such an action is a great shame for civil society and a slap in the face to democracy that Serbia has never received.⁴⁹

Even during this reporting period, the attacks and intimidation of civil society organizations did not receive their legal epilogue. The competent Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue has declared itself as not competent to deal with pressures and attacks on civil society.⁵⁰ The "List" case did not get its final epilogue either when numerous civil society organizations came under attack from the Directorate for the Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism.

Allocation of financial resources from the state budget to phantom governmental non-governmental organizations in Serbia remains a problem. In 2021, the Ministry of Family Care and Democracy allocated 658 million dinars to civil society organizations. According to BIRN data, 70% of these organizations are unknown to the public.^{51 52}

Serbia remains the only country in the region that does not have a Council for the Development and Cooperation of Civil Society, which could contribute to improving communication between state institutions and CSOs.⁵³

49 N1: Sastanak sa Konventom uz packe Ane Brnabić i Dačića civilnom društvu, <https://bit.ly/3BTxSXL>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

50 PrEUgovor: Izveštaj koalicije prEUgovor o napretku Srbije u klasteru 1 - maj, <https://bit.ly/3fqsK5o>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

51 BIRN: Sporni konkursi Ministarstva za brigu o porodici i demografiju, <https://bit.ly/3UOM7VR>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

52 PrEUgovor: Izveštaj koalicije prEUgovor o napretku Srbije u klasteru 1 - maj, <https://bit.ly/3fqsK5o>, accessed on 28.09.2022

53 Građanske inicijative: Organizacije civilnog društva u Srbiji rade u nepovoljnom okruženju, <https://bit.ly/3fs5iom>, accessed on 28.09.2022.

5. Freedom of expression

In 2022, Serbia ranked 79th on Reporters Without Borders' (RSB) World Press Freedom Index. Although it is 14 places better than the previous year, it is due to a change in methodology, due to which the index's authors themselves say it is impossible to make direct comparisons to previous scores. RSB warned that while the legal framework is good, journalists are threatened by political pressures and impunity for the crimes committed against them. They are often faced with political attacks fuelled by members of the ruling elite, amplified by certain national TV networks.⁵⁴ In its report, Freedom House noted the decline in press freedom due to continued and growing pressure on independent media and journalists, as well as a rise in media capture.⁵⁵

Unlike previous reports, both highlighted the problem of misinformation and fake news that have been further advanced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Intimidation of journalists and media organisations

From October 2021 to September 2022, the Regional Platform for Advocating Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety recorded **more than 50 attacks on journalists** – from verbal and death threats and bodily harm, through physical attacks, to cases of attacks on media outlets and organisations, which does not represent an improvement in comparison to the previous year.⁵⁶

Journalists' safety was especially endangered when reporting from public gatherings and protests. **Physical attacks, using pepper spray, smashing cameras, and expelling journalists from press conferences** marked this reporting period.⁵⁷ As well as in the previous year, threats against journalist and university professor Dinko Gruhonjić continued.⁵⁸

The **media organisations were also exposed to physical attacks**. The gateway of the Hungarian media house, which includes RTV Panon, Subotica Hungarian Radio, the Subotica editorial board of the daily "Hungarian So" and the weekly "Het Nap", was smashed

54 Reporters Without Borders, World Press Freedom Index, <https://rsf.org/en/country/serbia>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

55 Freedom House: Serbia: Nations in Transit 2022, <https://bit.ly/3relwnV>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

56 Safe Journalists, <https://safejournalists.net/>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

57 Safe Journalists, <https://safejournalists.net/>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

58 Ibid.

by a group of younger people.⁵⁹ A similar incident occurred when unknown perpetrators smashed glass on the official premises of the Šabac newspaper "Glas Podrinje" during the night.⁶⁰

However, the case that attracted the most attention and highlighted the deficient work of the institutions is **the continued attack on OK radio and its employees** - breaking window glass, throwing the paint on the equipment and walls of the radio, as well as walling part of the radio premises, because they opposed the intention to expand the betting shop where the radio premises are located. On this occasion, threats were also made to Veran Matić, President of the Permanent Working Group on Journalist Safety, which gathered in Vranje to show support for OK radio.⁶¹ Reactions to the case were also followed by the OSCE and RWB, who urged Serbian authorities to guarantee the safety of OK radio journalists.⁶²

As in the previous period, **the most reported threats and attacks were against independent journalists and the media**. In January 2022, in prime time, TV Pink aired a 20-minute video called "Target Family", in which the author portrayed the investigative journalists, media, opposition, and some current and former state officials, as part of a conspiracy group seeking to assassinate the President of Serbia and his family.⁶³ The same video was broadcasted by other media characterised as pro-government – Studio B, Happy and several local stations. The reactions came from journalists' associations, who noted that this is a dangerous **targeting of independent journalists and the media**⁶⁴, which is a "tv-warrant" broadcasted on national television, directed at independent and investigative journalists and editors. International organisations have urged authorities to investigate who is behind the campaign, and politicians and officials to encourage the work of journalists instead of participating in discreditation and smearing campaigns against them.⁶⁵

In December 2021, the trial chamber of the Special Organised Crime Unit of the High Court

59 N1: Nepoznati napadač razbio staklo zgrade mađarske medijske kuće u Subotici, <https://bit.ly/3DCWfex>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

60 Danas: Napad na prostorije šabačkog nedeljnika „Glas Podrinja“, <https://bit.ly/3RRWCGI>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

61 Slobodna reč: Veran Matić: Napadi na OK radio su nedopustivi i sramotni, <https://bit.ly/3LpTIGs>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

62 Reporters Without Borders: Serbian local radio station threatened by powerful businessman, <https://bit.ly/3LjRWXj>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

63 N1: „TV poternica, a ne dokumentarac“ – meta na onima koji ne misle kao predsednik , <https://bit.ly/3qRYyCx>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

64 NUNS: Koalicija za slobodu medija: Opasno targetiranje na Televiziji Pink, <https://bit.ly/3qS4b3D>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

65 Cenzolovka: CPJ: Vlasti treba da podstiču rad novinara u Srbiji, a ne da ih blate, <https://bit.ly/3SeWdgG>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

in Belgrade found four men convicted of **the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija**, and sentenced to a total of 100 years in prison. However, an appeal against the verdict has been logged and the decision will be made by the Court of Appeal.⁶⁶

In December 2021, the Court of Appeals in Belgrade abolished a February 2021 first-instance verdict that sentenced former Belgrade Municipality President of Grocka Dragoljub Simonović to four years and three months in prison on charges of inciting the **burning of the house of Žig info portal journalist Milan Jovanović in 2018**. In September 2022, four years after Jovanović's house was burned down, the retrial of the four defendants began, after more than six months of delay.⁶⁷

In 2021, a **website Safe Journalist and an SOS hotline** were established to increase the efficiency of responses in cases of attacks on journalists and to take actions to protect their safety. However, there is no indication that the Serbian government's move contributed to increased security and better response by state institutions.

An additional problem for investigative journalists is access to official sources of information. Institutions ignore investigative media, preventing them from obtaining official confirmations of information, making it even more difficult for them to work.⁶⁸

Regulatory environment and work of independent institutions

While the Government of Serbia has adopted the **Action Plan for the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2025 (Media Strategy)**, which envisions amending 13 laws by the end of 2022, the most important of which are the Law on Public Information and Media, the Law on Electronic Media and the Law on Public Media Services, its application has been missing. **None of the three laws have yet been amended**. Experts point out that a number of problems arise in the Strategy, which offers solutions, but it does not bring with it political will and a genuine determination to solve accumulated problems.⁶⁹ While the draft Law on Amending and

66 Fondacija Slavko Ćuruvija: Umesto odluke o prvostepenoj presudi za ubistvo Ćuruvije, Apelacioni sud treći put promenio sastav sudskog veća, <https://bit.ly/3RPgsl0>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

67 N1: Novinar Milan Jovanović mora još da čeka na pravdu, suđenje vraćeno na početak, <https://bit.ly/3drlICj>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

68 Danas: Maksić: Najveći dobitnici na konkursima mediji bliski vladajućoj partiji, <https://bit.ly/3xy9E3w>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

69 NUNS: Mršav učinak Medijske strategije: Medijski zakoni čekaju novu Skupštinu i Vladu, već istekao rok za Zakon o javnom informisanju, <https://bit.ly/3UhWFg1>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

Supplementing the Law on Electronic Media has been in the procedure since March 2021, the other two have not even entered the procedure.⁷⁰ The OSCE and other international institutions have called for full implementation of the Media Strategy and Action Plan.⁷¹

Numerous **criticisms of the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media's (REM) work** were expressed during the election campaign. The Bureau for Social Research (BIRODI) assessed that REM failed to exercise its competencies in monitoring media coverage during the April elections, failing to implement OSCE methodological rules.⁷² It also warned that REM, despite a series of sanctions at its disposal, had limited its sanctions to ineffective warnings, which did not function as a deterrent to prevent further violations.⁷³

Public broadcasters and economic factors

During this reporting period, numerous criticisms were made at the expense of the work of public broadcasters – Radio-Television Serbia (RTS) and Radio-Television Vojvodina (RTV). The results of CRTA's monitoring, from October 2021 to February 2022, show that before the elections were announced, there was a chronic lack of political pluralism in the most-watched media.⁷⁴ The programmes selected by RTS for the participation of the opposition left opposition representatives out of prime time, which according to the media monitoring findings of the CRTA Monitoring Mission were reserved exclusively for representatives of the authorities.⁷⁵

In the last period, as one form of economic pressure, **SLAPP** lawsuits stand out - "Strategic lawsuits against public participation". In the past year, the KRIK research **portal has received 11 lawsuits**, which present a burden on the normal functioning of the newsroom, demanding a great deal of time and attention, affecting the quality of the portal's work.⁷⁶ A number of organisations have warned that the lawsuits are another attempt to stifle

70 Narodna skupština Republike Srbije: Predlog Zakona o izmeni i dopunama Zakona o elektronskim medijima, <https://bit.ly/3ELdIEP>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

71 N1: Predstavница OEBS: Potpuno primeniti Medijsku strategiju i Akcioni plan, <https://bit.ly/3BZnaQx>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

72 BIRODI: REM-ova (auto)cenzura "Vučićevog frižidera" u izveštaju o izornoj kampanji, <https://bit.ly/3DDE5Jp>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

73 ENEMO: Izveštaj o preliminarnim nalazima i zaključcima, <https://bit.ly/3BoG1kX>, accessed on 22.08.2022.

74 CRTA: Izbori 2022: Kampanja pre kampanje, <https://bit.ly/3RT0WYF>, accessed on 22.08.2022.

75 Ibid.

76 NUNS: „Maltretiranje medija za male pare“: KRIK tužen 11 puta za godinu dana, <https://bit.ly/3BPSaCf>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

media freedom and investigative media in Serbia, filed by people in power and their close controversial businesspeople and the media, without any of them previously addressing the newsroom, demanding denials or correction of the text.⁷⁷

In April 2022, the REM Council announced a public competition for **licensing for the provision of television broadcasting and media services** via terrestrial digital and analogue transmission for the whole Republic of Serbia - national frequencies.⁷⁸ The competition has been announced for four television and four radio broadcast licenses for the period of eight years. According to the REM's Rulebook on Minimum Conditions for Providing Media Service, selected channels are obliged to meet certain technical, spatial, personnel, financial and program criteria.⁷⁹

Fourteen televisions – N1, Nova S, Pink, Vesti, Happy, Prva, B92, K1, UNA, Kopernikus, BK, Tanjug, TV2 and Kurir applied for the competition for four national frequencies. In late July, REM announced that national broadcast licenses were granted to televisions that had them before: Pink, Happy, B92 and Prva – televisions characterised as pro-government, which often violated laws, regulations, codes and ethical norms, and did not meet the minimum requirements set out in the competition during their work in previous years, as confirmed by the annual reports of REM itself.⁸⁰ In 2020, **more than 12,000 violations of the Advertising Act were committed by the four broadcasters**, and more complaints were filed for hate speech and broadcasting violence.⁸¹ On the same day that four frequencies were confirmed, the REM Council announced a competition for **the fifth national frequency**, which has been unoccupied during previous years.

In late August, the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation and CRTA filed a lawsuit against REM's decision, which reassigned REM broadcast licenses with national coverage to televisions that for years did not comply with even the minimum prescribed conditions for providing media service. The lawsuit alleges that REM's decision to grant licenses to Pink, Happy, Prva and B92 televisions was made on the basis of a selective and inaccurate interpretation

⁷⁷ AOM: Tužbe protiv KRIK-a su model gušenja medijskih sloboda u Srbiji, <https://bit.ly/3qLKzOC>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

⁷⁸ Regulatorno telo za elektronske medije: Javni konkursi za 2022. godinu, <https://bit.ly/3dsLMaQ>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

⁷⁹ Pravilnik o minimalnim uslovima za pružanje medijske usluge i kriterijumima za odlučivanje u postupku izdavanja dozvole za pružanje medijske usluge na osnovu sprovedenog javnog konkursa, <https://bit.ly/3LwgBrK>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

⁸⁰ REM: Arhiva izveštaja i analiza o nadzoru emitera, <https://bit.ly/3f2wqKj>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

⁸¹ Koalicija za slobodu medija: Odluka REM-a je nastavak medijskog mraka u Srbiji, <https://bit.ly/3DwInlX>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

of the facts, which violated the criteria and rules governing the procedure for granting broadcast licenses.⁸²

The **problem of co-financing the media** was also present during this period. In competitions for media co-financing, local governments allocated RSD 1.4 billion by the end of July 2022, about 290m dinars more than during the same period the previous year.⁸³ Research by the Balkan Research Network (BIRN) has shown that the biggest “profiteers” of public competitions for co-financing of close-knit television projects, and the absolute record holder among them is Radio-Television Novi Pazar with more than RSD 155 million awarded since 2019, followed by Novi Sad Television with 87.3 million dinars, followed by Sremska Television with just under 61 million dinars.⁸⁴ The criticism came from a number of organisations that noted that the Ministry of Culture and Information **abused the project co-financing system**, by deciding to form commissions to include a number of supposedly independent media experts.⁸⁵ Experts have repeatedly warned of a problem when appointing commission members is non-transparent without a clearly formulated criterion.⁸⁶

It was also noted that during this period, multimillion-dinar amounts were awarded to Alo and Informer even though, according to data from the Press Council, from 1 July to 31 December 2021, there were a total of 2,227 of their articles **in violation of the Code of Journalists of Serbia**.⁸⁷

82 CRTA: Slavko Ćuruvija fondacija i CRTA tužili REM, <https://bit.ly/3DE66Ay>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

83 UNS: Lokalne samouprave izdvojile 1,4 milijarde dinara za medije do kraja jula, <https://bit.ly/3Saixbm>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

84 BIRN: RTV Novi Pazar apsolutni rekorder u medijskom finansiranju, <https://bit.ly/3UmTJi8>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

85 UNS, Koalicija za slobodu medija i ANEM: Ministarstvo kulture i informisanja zloupotrebilo instituciju nezavisnog medijskog stručnjaka, <https://bit.ly/3UjCBtN>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

86 Medija Centar: Izveštaj – Medijska strategija, <https://bit.ly/3S0VvEo>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

87 Savet za štampu: Izveštaj o monitoringu poštovanja Kodeksa novinara Srbije u dnevnim novinama u periodu od 1. jula do 31. decembra 2021. godine, <https://bit.ly/3RZeDCv>, accessed on 22.09.2022.

Centre for Contemporary Politics



The Centre for Contemporary Politics is a civil society organisation from Belgrade, founded in 2012, whose activities are focused on democratization, European integration process and regional cooperation. The main goals of the organisation are development and promotion of democracy, the support for the EU integration process and the promotion of European values, as well as regional stability and cooperation. The vision of the organisation is democratic Serbia within united Europe.

The Centre for Contemporary Politics its program goals achieves through the publishing of research and other publications, organisation of events and through other media projects, as well as through youth education. The focus of the organisation is on the research part of its work and active involvement in Serbia's European integration process.

The Centre for Contemporary Politics is a founder of the portal European Western Balkans, a regional web portal in English language, on European integration of the countries of the Western Balkans, through which it realises its media projects.

European Western Balkans



European Western Balkans is a regional web portal specialized in European integration process of the Western Balkan countries, founded in Belgrade in 2014.

Besides European integration, portal follows the topics related to a common European future of the Western Balkans, such as regional cooperation, political stability and the enactment of reforms in key areas.

European Western Balkans is entirely independent and is published by the Centre for Contemporary Politics, Belgrade-based think tank.

Civil Society as a Force of Change in Serbia's EU Accession



CIVILNO DRUŠTVO ZA
UNAPREĐENJE PRISTUPANJA
SRBIJE EVROPSKOJ UNIJI



Švedska
Sverige

Civil Society as a Force of Change in Serbia's EU Accession – CS4EU" is a project implemented by the Belgrade Open School with the support of the Kingdom of Sweden. The project aims to support the more active participation of civil society organizations and the media in the process of accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union (EU).

Within the CS4EU project, BOS is implementing the Civil Society and Media Support Program in the field of European Integration, which aims to contribute to Serbia's European integration process and democratic development by strengthening the role of civil society and the media.

The project includes 45 civil society organizations and media from all over Serbia in the network of partners who will work for five years (2017-2021) in order to increase the role of civil society in representing the interests of local communities in the process of European integration, ensuring the democratic influence of civil society on public authorities, and improving the quality of public participation in the decision-making process and negotiations with the EU.



EU-RS THINK TANK

