

5
years

Shadow Report

**State of Democracy
in Serbia 2021**

 **CSP**
EU-RS THINK TANK

Editor:
Nemanja Todorović Štiplija

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

Assistants:
Aleksandra Marković, Sanja Petrov

Design and prepress:
Bratislav Bojić

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Introduction

This document represents a regular shadow report on the state of democracy in Serbia, which is published by the Centre for Contemporary Politics since 2017. Since this is the fifth State of Democracy in Serbia report, with whose publication a five-year period from October 2016 to September 2021 is now covered, in this introduction we can assess of the state of democracy both in the last year covered by this report and in the last 5 years since the first report was published. The specificity of this one-year period, as well as the state of democratic institutions in Serbia in recent years, justifies a review of the last five years of the state of democracy in Serbia in order to put recent events in an appropriate context.

Since 2017, when the first shadow report of the Centre for Contemporary Politics on the state of democracy in Serbia came out, there has been a clear weakening of democratic institutions, both according to foreign and domestic organizations and experts. In 2019, Freedom House ranked Serbia among the “partly free” countries, and in 2020, this organization defined Serbia as a “transitional or hybrid regime” in its Nations in Transit index. There was also a sharp decline in the list of media freedom of Reporters Without Borders, where Serbia has been ranked 93rd since 2020, which is a drop of 39 places compared to 2014.

The reports of the Centre for Contemporary Politics on the state of democracy in Serbia do not contain quantitative indicators, and therefore did not record these declines numerically, but their careful reading can reveal the same remarks and problems that led to the agreement of both domestic and international organizations that Serbia is backsliding when it comes to democratic institutions. Significant problems have been identified in all areas covered by the State of Democracy in Serbia, especially in the areas of elections and media freedom, key reasons for the weakening of democracy in Serbia, but also the political crisis that began in late 2018 and whose end is not in sight.

After the controversial parliamentary and local elections in June 2020, but also other serious problems covered by the previous report, the question emerged whether Serbia is still a democratic country, and whether it is moving away from membership in the European Union because of this. A year later, both questions remain open. In Serbia, there is an almost one-party parliament without opposition, civil society and the media are under pressure, while media pluralism is even more endangered. On the other hand, Serbia has not taken the slightest step towards membership in the European Union in the last year, not opening any new chapters or clusters of chapters in this period.

Processes that were expected to help provide positive answers to both of these questions, primarily the inter-party dialogue mediated by the European Parliament, as well as the application of the new enlargement methodology in which democracy should have a more prominent place than before, have so far shown no significant results. That is why Serbia is entering into the next one-year period with the possibility that the political crisis can be resolved and mitigated, but also worsened and radicalized.

In the period covered by this report, no significant changes were noticed, but rather the continuation of the same patterns of government behaviour and the same problems faced by the media and civil society, as well as the political challengers of the incumbent government. Improvements can be seen in some areas, such as the functioning of parliament or the adoption of important action plans and the establishment of working groups, but all this progress is completely overshadowed by the ruling party's absolute dominance and its attacks on the media and civil society which takes place at the same time as the invitations for participation in various working groups and social dialogue.

The authors of the report *The State of Democracy in Serbia* also felt on their own skin the mechanisms of pressure on civil society, as after they wrote about orchestrated campaigns from phantom portals on the civil society in the last year's report, they eventually became a target of such a campaign, when their biographies and photographs were published in various pro-government media with the assessment that they were "Western informants". This was followed by the spread of this news from fake accounts on social networks, followed by various threats.

Democracy and European integration

European integration is still a strategic goal of the Serbian government, which is persistently trying to present its results as a significant success on the road towards membership in the European Union. However, the absence of opening new chapters due to problems with the rule of law and democracy clearly shows that substantial progress in this direction will require much more than the adoption of documents and rhetorical commitment to the European Union and its values. Therefore, we can talk about the connection between the issue of the state of democracy in Serbia and the issue of Serbia's European perspective, which on the one hand provides encouragement, but also raises fears for the future of both these processes.

Democracy represents one of the political Copenhagen criteria – adopted during the European Council meeting in 1993 – that countries are required to fulfil in order to be able

to become EU member states. Other political criteria are the rule of law and protection of human and minority rights, while economic criteria are related to existence and functioning of a 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 European Council in Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993

What the European Union regards as democracy in its own reports – elections, work of the parliament, governance, and the civil society – remains outside negotiating chapters, and therefore frequently outside the public discourse on European integration. These issues, however, remain of fundamental importance for the success of this process, and according to the new enlargement methodology adopted in March 2020, it is located together with Chapters 23 and 24 in the cluster dealing with fundamental issues.

About the report *State of Democracy in Serbia 2021*

State of Democracy in Serbia 2021 represents a shadow report on the issues covered under democracy in the European Commission report on Serbia: elections, parliament, governance, and civil society – as well as freedom of media, which even though does not fall under democracy in these reports – remains tightly connected with these issues and was previously also separated from the negotiating chapters, in the part of the report which concerned the political Copenhagen criteria.

The report *State of Democracy in Serbia 2021* covers the period from October 2020 to September 2021. It represents the fifth annual shadow report on the state of democracy in Serbia published by the Centre for Contemporary Politics / European Western Balkans.

1. Elections

No elections were held at the national level in Serbia in the reporting period, with only several local elections taking place. Nevertheless, **electoral conditions in the country remained a dominant issue in political life** after the June 2020 elections, which were, due to a large number of irregularities, assessed as the most controversial ones since the 2000 democratic changes in last year's State of Democracy in Serbia 2020.

In October 2020, four months after the elections, which left the parliament almost without opposition, mainly due to the boycott of opposition organizations, President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, announced that a **snap parliamentary election would take place by 3 April 2022**.¹ At the time of the conclusion of this report, the latest information is that the ruling coalition is planning on holding a snap parliamentary election together with the regular presidential election and regular local election in Belgrade on that very day.²

This decision means that elections at different levels will be taking place simultaneously, which is a continuation of a long-standing trend in Serbia. This trend negatively affects political debate on local issues, as well as the personalization of politics.

In the reporting period, as **many as three parallel processes were launched to improve election conditions** - the process of implementing the recommendations of the OSCE³ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), dialogue between the government and the opposition facilitated by the European Parliament and dialogue between the government and the opposition "without the participation of foreigners" – but, for now, there is **no evidence that any of these processes has significantly improved the electoral conditions**.

Implementation of ODIHR recommendations

The ODIHR Final Report on the parliamentary election in Serbia was published on 7 October 2020. It confirmed all the main findings of the preliminary report of this organisation, as well as the reports of civil society organisations, including the State of Democracy in Serbia 2020: among other things, that President Vučić, combining the functions of the head of state and the president of the Serbian Progressive Party, gained an unfair advantage in the

1 N1: Vučić: Vanredni parlamentarni izbori najkasnije 3. aprila 2022, <https://bit.ly/3lTDEjB>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

2 Politika: Predlog vlasti – izbori 3. aprila, <https://bit.ly/3zEhQgE>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

3 Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

media⁴, that there were multiple allegations of pressure on voters⁵, and that the diversity of views in the media was limited.⁶ ODIHR gave 29 recommendations (in the report from 2017, that number was 20, and in the report from 2016, 25).

After the elections, the Government renewed the work of the Working Group for Cooperation with OSCE and ODIHR, which was established for the first time in September 2019. However, for now, the official website of the Working Group lists only two meetings – on 1 March 2021⁷ and 16 April 2021.⁸ Representatives of civil society were present at the meeting on 1 March, and a draft report on measures to be taken to improve the election process was discussed. A subsequent analysis of CRTA **showed that the measures proposed by the Working Group relate to a total of 18 of the 29 recommendations** from the ODIHR Report.⁹ CRTA assessed that the Working Group **completely ignores** the abuse of public resources and public office, campaign financing problems, pressure on voters, as well as unequal media representation of electoral participants.

However, even the implementation of those recommendations envisaged by the Working Group is very slow. Since the mentioned post from 16 April 2021, there is no new information on the website of the Working Group on the implementation of the ODIHR recommendations. Prime Minister Ana Brnabić stated on 8 April 2021 that the amendments to the three laws that regulate the matter of elections¹⁰ are in preparation. By the end of the reporting period, these laws did not enter the parliamentary procedure.¹¹ The same applies to the Law on Financing Political Activities, the draft of which was seen by the Center for Investigative

4 Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights: Special Election Assessment Mission Final Report, page 13, <https://bit.ly/2WbDjQE>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid, page 16.

7 Government of Republic of Serbia: Further steps towards the improvement of the electoral process, <https://bit.ly/3EKZTkt>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

8 Government of Republic of Serbia: Continued work on the improvement of the electoral process with the assistance of OSCE, <https://bit.ly/39wTRp5>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

9 CRTA analysis of the measures proposed for the improvement of the electoral process of the Working Group for the cooperation with OSCE/ODIHR, <https://bit.ly/3u9MEVz>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

10 Law on Election of Deputies, Law on Election of the President of the Republic, Law on Local Elections

11 National Assembly of Serbia: Laws in parliamentary procedure, <https://bit.ly/3CHszZJ>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

Journalism of Serbia (CINS) in July 2021, and which was not published by the end of the reporting period.¹²

In April 2021, the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government issued a new Instruction for the implementation of the Law on the Single Electoral Roll, which enables voters to check its content.¹³ Also in April, a Working Group for a complete inspection of the Electoral Roll was formed.¹⁴

The fact that so little has been done to implement ODIHR recommendations, even though 15 months have passed since the elections were held, and only 6 months remain until the next ones, **indicates above all the lack of political will** to significantly improve the election conditions.

Dialogues of the ruling and opposition parties

During the reporting period, the Inter-Party Dialogue, jointly facilitated by the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dačić and the current and former Members of the European Parliament – Tanja Fajon, Vladimír Bilčík, Eduard Kukan, and Knut Fleckenstein – continued.

Although the elections were held on 21 June 2020, the Inter-Party Dialogue did not officially continue until 1 March 2021, and the work on the document with measures that would improve the election conditions began only after the meeting in Belgrade on 9 and 10 July 2021.¹⁵ Representatives of the opposition and civil society on several occasions assessed that the dialogue was moving too slowly and that it was running late.¹⁶ The position of the representatives of the European Parliament was to start drafting measures after the live meeting in Belgrade, which was not possible until July 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After a two-day meeting on 17 and 18 September 2021, **the co-facilitators adopted a**

¹² CINS: Tajni nacrt: Šta sve donose izmene pravila o finansiranju izborne kampanje, <https://bit.ly/3lS5xZC>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

¹³ Legal-information system of the Republic of Serbia, <https://bit.ly/3ERuWLI>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

¹⁴ N1: Vlada Srbije formirala Radnu grupu za proveru kompletnog biračkog spiska, <https://bit.ly/2XMJxHb>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

¹⁵ European Parliament Global Democracy Support: Latest News, <https://bit.ly/3zxK2lu>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

¹⁶ Danas: Raša Nedeljkov: Početak dijaloga vlasti i opozicije već kasni, <https://bit.ly/3ufUBsn>; Demostat: Opozicija spremna čeka dijalog, <https://bit.ly/3i45300>, Narodna stranka: Ponoš: Dijalog mora što pre da počne jer već kasni, <https://bit.ly/2XUJ9qo>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

document entitled “Measures to improve the conduct of the electoral process”.¹⁷ The document contains 16 measures, and their implementation is still pending. One of the key measures proposed is the establishment of a Temporary Supervisory Body, whose six members would be proposed by the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM), three would be proposed by the oppositions from the EU-facilitated dialogue and three by the opposition from the dialogue without EU participation. This body would monitor the work of the media and independent institutions, primarily the implementation of new rulebooks for public broadcasters and recommendations for private television, and report to the public. Also, among other things, it is planned to expand the Republic Election Commission (currently 17 members) with six representatives of the opposition and to adopt a new methodology of media monitoring in consultation with the Temporary Supervisory Body. Recommendations related to the prevention of the pressure on voters, abuse of public office and public resources remained vague and limited to improving existing systems and procedures.

Immediately after the publication of the document, **it became questionable that they would lead to significant improvements in the electoral process.** First of all, **the majority of the opposition** participating in the dialogue¹⁸ **assessed the document as unsatisfactory** and it remains to be seen which of them will participate in the implementation of measures, on which their influence on the electoral process will largely depend. Also, **members of CRTA and the Bureau for Social Research (BIRODI) criticised the content of the measures** in the days after their publication as insufficient to significantly improve the electoral conditions.¹⁹

In addition to the dialogue facilitated by the European Parliament, the ruling parties announced in February 2021 a dialogue **“without the participation of foreigners”**, which takes place in the National Assembly with the occasional participation of the President of Serbia and the Serbian Progressive Party Aleksandar Vučić. **The motives for “duplicating” the dialogue remained controversial** – Speaker of the National Assembly Ivica Dačić claimed that the intention was to provide a platform for talks with the parties that refuse EU mediation, while a part of the public saw it as an attempt to marginalise the dialogue

17 European Parliament, <https://bit.ly/3CEDeEH>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

18 Freedom and Justice Party, Democratic Party, Free Citizens Movement, Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own, Together for Serbia, Peoples' Party, Dveri and several other organisations.

19 BIRODI: Analysis of the Draft Conclusions of the Second Phase of the Inter-Party Dialogue, <https://bit.ly/3EPFYg>, CRTA: Analysis: Proposals for Inter-Party Dialogue mediated by the EP will not provide the conditions for fair and free elections, <https://bit.ly/3o3BhNT>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

mediated by the European Parliament.²⁰ From 18 May to 2 September 2021, a total of thirteen meetings of the Working Group established for this “lane” of dialogue were held.²¹

Until the conclusion of this report, the final agreement has not been reached in this dialogue, but based on media reports on the draft agreement offered by the ruling party, **it is difficult to expect that it will lead to a significant improvement in election conditions**, primarily due to lack of pressure from the opposition in the dialogue. It almost entirely consists of the parties that are not critical of the government in their public appearances and which, with the exception of Dveri, participated in the 2020 elections without major objections to the conditions.

Indicators of the state of electoral conditions during the reporting period

Although no elections were held at the national level in the reporting period, several indicators that suggest that the state of electoral conditions is not better than the previous year.

First of all, **the government continued to dominate television channels with national coverage**. Media monitoring of CRTA, conducted from 16 July 2020 to 31 March 2021, which monitored the central news slots, showed that in this period the share of the time devoted to the parties in power ranged from 85% (in August 2020) to 96% (in December 2020 and February 2021). The tone of the representation of the parties in power was almost completely neutral or positive, while the tonality of the representation of the opposition was predominantly negative.²²

Similar findings were made by BIRODI's monitoring of the central news programs, conducted from 1 December 2020 to 15 April 2021. BIRODI's findings showed that the presence of President Aleksandar Vučić was even greater in the non-election period than was the case in the campaign for the 2020 parliamentary elections and that for this period it amounts to 38.5% of the total time.²³

The only noticeable change in the editorial policy of televisions with national coverage in this period was made by the Radio-Television of Serbia (RTS), where from December 2020

²⁰ EWB: Nova odlaganja međupartijskog dijaloga, početak tek u drugoj polovini marta?, <https://bit.ly/3i3Fduj>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

²¹ National Assembly: Calendar, <https://bit.ly/3IU4Mzd>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

²² CRTA: Media monitoring of the political pluralism in Serbia, July 2020 – March 2021, <https://bit.ly/3o4Fi4W>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

²³ Media Centre: Press conference of the Bureau for Social Research, <https://bit.ly/3i39gIW>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

to June 2021, 13 **one-hour debate shows** ("Reč na reč")²⁴ were held, followed by several joint appearances of government and opposition representatives in the morning program from July to September 2021. However, **it is highly questionable whether these shows can represent an effective counterweight** to the trends noted by CRTA and BIRODI, not only due to the still limited time that opposition representatives have to speak, but also due to the fact that the criticism of the editorial policy of the channels with national coverage has gone significantly beyond the absence of the debate shows.

When it comes to other indicators of electoral conditions, the **local elections held in Zaječar and Kosjerić** on 28 March 2021 (won by the Serbian Progressive Party) **featured significant abuse of office for a political campaign** – visits by members of the Government members were 40 times more frequent than the previous four years.²⁵

President Vučić's announcement that all pensioners will receive state aid in the amount of 20,000 RSD (around 170 EUR) in February 2022²⁶, two months before the announced elections, is problematic from the point of view of potential **misuse of public resources for election purposes**, which was the case with the distribution of 100 EUR to every adult citizen before the 2020 elections.

In addition, in June 2021, the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade rejected without proper explanation a part of CRTA's criminal report against an unknown person in the town of Ub, who was recorded on the day of the June 2020 elections suggesting to citizens which box to tick.²⁷

In September 2021, a protest walk was held in the Novi Sad quarter of "Liman 3", in support of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. The Serbian Progressive Party previously lost the election for the local community council in "Liman 3".²⁸ The fact that some of the leading participants in the walk were dressed as football hooligans can be interpreted as a form of intimidation of voters and the opposition in the context of the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections.²⁹

24 RTS, <https://bit.ly/3u7lajr>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

25 Transparency Serbia: Elections filled with problematic occurrences, <https://bit.ly/3kASD2p>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

26 Tanjug: Vučić: Penzionerima u februaru po 20.000 dinara, <https://bit.ly/2XUJzwY>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

27 Crta: Kako snimak nije dovoljan dokaz izborne nepravilnosti?, <https://bit.ly/3lRRRxH>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

28 N1: Nezavisni kandidati u Novom Sadu preuzeli nekoliko saveta mesnih zajednica, <https://bit.ly/2XG6SKu>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

29 Danas: Reakcije opozicije na protestnu šetnju mladih naprednjaka u Novom Sadu, <https://bit.ly/2WcRcy2>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

2. Parliament

The period in which the **level of pluralism common to democratic countries is absent from the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia**, which has lasted for over two years, indicates the now **deep crisis of parliamentary democracy in Serbia**. The reason for this situation was first the boycott of the work of the parliament by the majority of opposition MPs in the previous parliament, throughout 2019 and the first half of 2020, and then the boycott of the 2020 elections, which left the parliament with only seven (out of 250) opposition MPs. Six of them belong to national minority parties, while the seventh (MP Vladan Glišić) was elected from the list of the Serbian Patriotic Alliance (SPAS), which later merged with the Serbian Progressive Party.

This context **takes away the essential importance** of all the procedural improvements that have occurred in the meantime. **These could be considered a substantial** improvement in the work of the parliament **should they remain in force in the future parliaments**, which would include relevant opposition organisations.

In the reporting period, public opinion polls were published, showing a low level of citizens' trust in the parliament. According to a survey by CRTA published in March 2021, two thirds of citizens generally or completely agree that MPs care more about the interests of their political parties than the interests of citizens, and 58% of them think that MPs ruin the reputation of the National Assembly.³⁰

According to the Demostat survey from August 2021, only 1% of the supporters of the "boycotting opposition" have confidence in the parliament, while the supporters of the ruling parties also have a relatively low level of trust in this institution (42%).³¹

The twelfth convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia was **constituted on 3 August 2020**, but the MPs, although there was no objective obstacle, **did not start work until 22 October 2020**, four months after the June 2020 elections. Such a long period of inactivity is not comparable to other democratic countries has caused additional damage to parliamentarism in Serbia.

After six years as the Speaker of the National Assembly Maja Gojković (Serbian Progressive Party) was succeeded by Ivica Dačić, the President of the Socialist Party of Serbia and the

³⁰ CRTA: Citizens' opinions on participation in democratic processes, page 18, <https://bit.ly/2Y0WMEem>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

³¹ Demostat: "Letnji rejtnzi političkih partija u Srbiji, poverenje građana u institucije, odnos prema Kosovu i EU", <https://bit.ly/3EKTF4h>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

former Minister of Foreign Affairs. On 28 October 2020, 227 out of 232 MPs present voted for the new government.³²

One of the problematic trends that continued in the reporting period were the **verbal attacks** by the MPs, disregarding the topic on the agenda, towards the non-parliamentary opposition, journalists, civil society and public figures critical of the government.³³ These attacks often **reached unacceptable levels by democratic standards** and included attempts to discredit the targets on a personal level and to bring out a large number of accusations without evidence, including accusations of attempting a coup and collaboration with criminal groups.

The new Code of Conduct for MPs was adopted on 24 December 2020.³⁴ Despite the fact that it was adopted in the context of the fight against corruption, and on the recommendation of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), it attracted the most attention due to complaints filed against MPs from the parliamentary group "Aleksandar Vučić - For Our Children", who were accused of violating Article 8 of the Code, which prohibits speech that incites hatred and violence, and which degrades human dignity, although the sanctions provided at the time were only reprimands and public reprimands.

The only public reprimand issued during the first five months of the Code's existence was given to Srbi Slav Filipović, an MP from the "Aleksandar Vučić - For Our Children" group, for calling opposition politician Dragan Đilas a "fascist and Nazi", after the previous 9 complaints were rejected.³⁵

The Law on the Budget of the Republic of Serbia for 2021 was adopted on 10 December 2020. This draft law was the first item on the agenda, so the practice from 2017 and 2018, when hundreds of amendments were submitted to the laws preceding the Law on the Budget on the agenda, in order to spend time discussing the details of next year's budget, was not used. This practice stopped after two years, although in 2019 the majority of the opposition boycotted the session, while in 2020 there were only seven opposition MPs in the parliament.

³² Open Parliament, First Special Session 28.10.2020, <https://bit.ly/3AE8Qd2>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

³³ 021: VIDEO: Poslanica iz Novog Sada targetirala N1 i Novu kao "antisrpske medije" i "domaće izdajnike", <https://bit.ly/2ZiOwzV>, Nova: Poslanik SNS napao Seku Sablić: Gospođo, vi niste patriota, <https://bit.ly/2WdLonY>, Danas: CRTA: Tužilaštvo da ispita Aleksandra Martinovića i Vladimira Orlića, <https://bit.ly/3zEaJVC>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

³⁴ National Assembly: Decision on the Adoption of the Code of MPs, <https://bit.ly/2U2SwSH>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

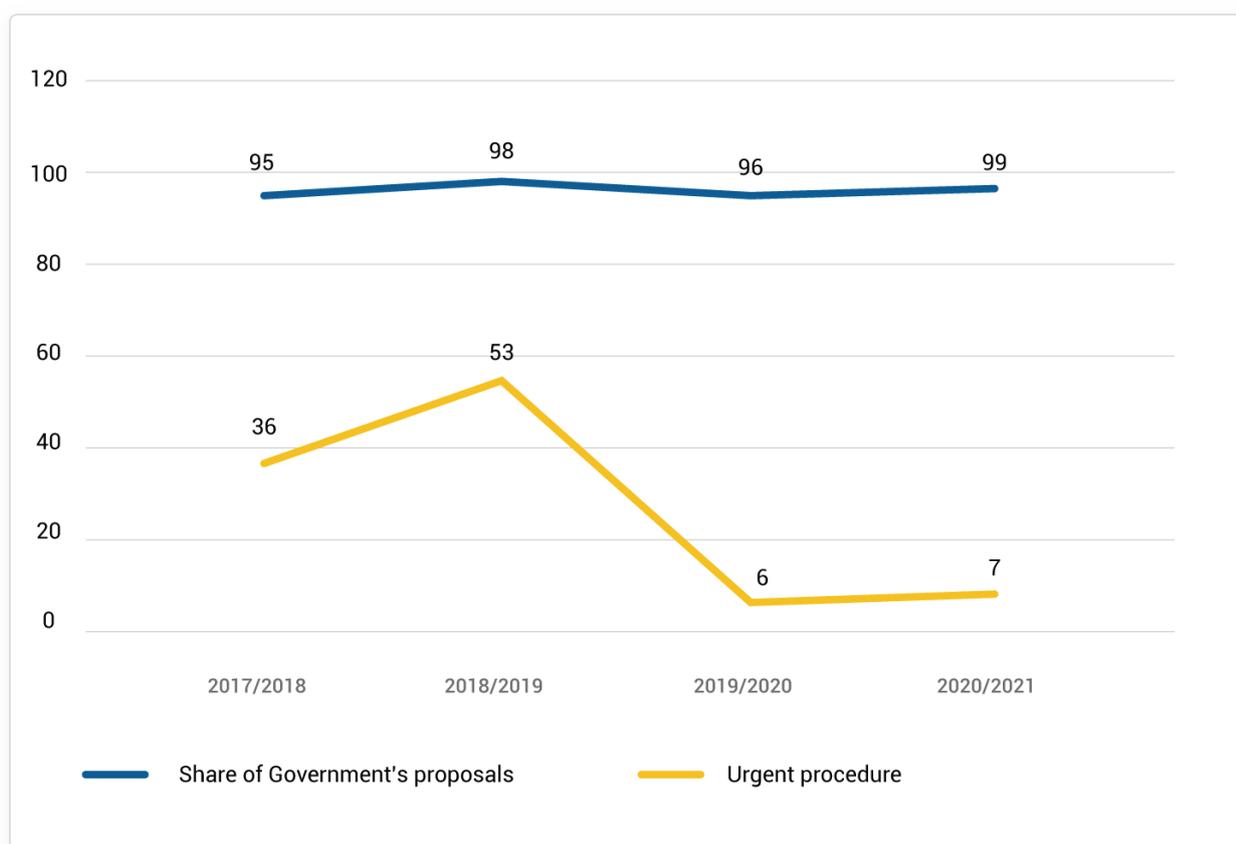
³⁵ CRTA: A paper or a reality? Analysis of the Code of conduct of the MPs and its enforcement, <https://bit.ly/2WaeynX>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

Table 2.1 Readings of the Draft Budget Laws 2014-2020

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

When it comes to the adoption of laws under the urgent procedure and the share of laws proposed by the Government, the situation has not changed compared to the previous year. Laws passed under the urgent procedure remained at an acceptably low level, while almost all laws passed, as in previous years, were proposed by the Government, which indicates the lack of initiative of MPs.

Graph 2.1 Share of the Government's proposals in the total number of adopted Laws and percentage of laws adopted using urgent procedure



The Government ministers, in relation to the previous editions of the State of Democracy, recorded the most regular presence in the National Assembly on the last Thursday of the month, which is a timeslot for the MPs to pose questions to them. Since the election of the Government at the end of October, only in December 2020 and August 2021, there was no such session.

Table 2.2 Presence of the members of Government at the sessions of the National Assembly on final Thursdays in a month

Month	Members of Government present	PM present	How many MPs asked a question?	How many opposition MPs?
September 2020	No (caretaker Government)	/	/	/
October 2020	No (Government just elected)	/	/	/
November 2020	Yes	Yes	9	1
December 2020	No	/	/	/
January 2021	Yes	Yes	9	1
February 2021	Yes	Yes	9	1
March 2021	Yes	Yes	6	2
April 2021	Yes	Yes	8	1
May 2021	Yes	Yes	8	1
June 2021	Yes	Yes	6	1
July 2021	Yes	Yes	8	1
August 2021	No	/	/	/

At the session on 26 December 2020, the National Assembly debated the reports of independent institutions, and a day later, on 27 December, the report of the European Commission on Serbia for 2020. As already mentioned, these trends are procedural improvements, but they will gain in importance if they continue in the more pluralistic future parliaments.

3. Governance

The new Government of Serbia was formed on 28 October 2020.³⁶ Despite the more than a convincing majority won by the Serbian Progressive Party in the June 2020 elections, the citizens of Serbia had to wait for almost four months for the formation of a new Government. Candidate for Prime Minister Ana Brnabić stated that ten ministries will be headed by women, at the proposal of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. Thus, women make up 46% of the new Government.³⁷ Two new ministries were established: the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, and the Ministry for the Care of the Family, Children and Demography.

The newly formed Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue took over part of the responsibilities of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, which was abolished in October 2020, before the formation of the Government. The main goal of the newly established ministry was defined as improving the European Commission's assessment of the state of human rights and the rule of law in Serbia from 2.2 to 2.64 points, or 20%, over a period of one year.³⁸ Seventy-one civil society organizations demanded an answer from the Government of Serbia as to why the Office was abolished in a completely non-transparent process, without prior consultations, while the competences of the new Ministry for cooperation with the civil sector had been reduced.³⁹

Serbia's accession to the European Union remained the main foreign policy priority, but the highest state officials continued to influence the undermining of citizens' trust in the EU with their statements, which also opened the space for stronger action by third actors outside the European Union.

Thus, the Socialist Movement, the party led by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Aleksandar Vulin, which is one of the parties participating in the government with the SNS, stated that **"if the MEPs could not or did not want to send vaccines to Serbia, they did not have to send amendments either"**.⁴⁰ This was a reaction to the critical amendments to the European Parliament's Report on Serbia. On the other hand, Minister for European Integration

36 EWB: Izabrana nova Vlada Srbije, <https://bit.ly/3hSid19>, accessed on 15.09.2021.

37 EWB: Zastupljenost žena u vladi Srbije: Korak ka rodnoj ravnopravnosti ili marketinški potez?, <https://bit.ly/3tYg5cY>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

38 Plan of the work of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, <https://bit.ly/3CtQ0FV>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

39 YIHR: Civil society worried about the abolishing of the Office for cooperation with the civil society, <https://bit.ly/3lFIAd7>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

40 Danas: Vulin kritikovao EU: Ako nam niste poslali vakcine, niste morali ni amandmane, <https://bit.ly/3i07Us0>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

Jadranka Joksimović stated that, while it was true that Serbia did not receive a single dose through the COVAX mechanism (global vaccine distribution system), that “it does not mean that the EU has not shown solidarity towards us, but that the system does not work as expected”.⁴¹

According to the report of the European Commission, the negotiating team of the Government of Serbia saw substantial turnover of staff, which had a negative impact on its capacity to fulfil its coordinating role.⁴² For more than a year and a half, Serbia did not have a head of the negotiating team after Tanja Mišćević resigned from this position.⁴³

Only in April 2021, did the Government pass the Decision on the establishment of the Coordination for negotiating Serbia's accession to the EU, as well as the formation of a Team for the Support of Negotiations. The established Coordination for negotiations, as stated in the Decision, should direct the accession process by creating conditions for the operation of the chief negotiator of the Republic of Serbia. The Team for the Support of the Negotiations was formed to prepare and draft negotiating positions.⁴⁴ According to the newly established structure, the Minister for European Integration remains in the position of chief negotiator, while the function of the head of the negotiating team has been abolished.

The session of the Coordination Body for the Process of accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union was held once during the reporting period, in April 2021. At the session, the Minister for European Integration and the Prime Minister of Serbia explained that a new Government coordination structure for negotiations with the EU was formed in order to conform with the principles of the new enlargement methodology. The continuity of the Coordination Body's meetings has been agreed upon with the aim of further accelerating and intensifying the monitoring of all reform activities in the accession process.⁴⁵ The report on the implementation of the National Program for the Adoption of the Acquis Communautaire, which records the level of harmonization of the adopted regulations with the *acquis communautaire*, has not been published since 2019.⁴⁶

41 RSE: Vakcine kao argument protiv izveštaja Evropskog parlamenta o Srbiji, <https://bit.ly/3IMRzbr>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

42 European Commission, Serbia 2020 Report, <https://bit.ly/3hP54pS>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

43 EWB: Godinu dana bez šefa pregovaračkog tima – evrointegracije nisu prioritet, <https://bit.ly/39GqKQd>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

44 EWB: Vlada reorganizuje pregovarački tim – formira se Koordinacija za pregovore, <https://bit.ly/2XC4XGD>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

45 Insajder: Sednica koordinacionog tela za proces pristupanja Srbije EU: Jadranka Joksimović glavni pregovarač, <https://bit.ly/3kz1Rw7>, accessed on 18.09.2021.

46 Ministry for European Integration, Documents, National Documents, NPAA, <https://bit.ly/2VVPOQ2>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

During the reporting period, there was progress in the process of **amending the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia** in the field of the judiciary, necessary for meeting the obligations of Chapter 23. However, Serbia is almost four years late with constitutional changes, given that the original deadline for amendments was the end of 2017. With the revision of the Action Plan for Chapter 23, this activity was postponed until the end of 2021. The Government proposal for changing the constitution was adopted by the parliament on 8 June 2021. On 3 September, the Working Group, which worked together with the members of the competent parliamentary committee, presented a proposal for an Act on Changing the Constitution. After the public hearings, this text is expected to be evaluated by the Venice Commission.⁴⁷

After several delays, the procedure of amending the highest legal act in Serbia has started again, and after a long time, the substance of the changes, not only in relation to the current Constitution, but also the Draft Constitutional Amendments from 2018, were made public. However, short deadlines for public hearings and familiarisation with the text again degraded the quality of public debate on this topic.⁴⁸ There are reasons to doubt that the citizens are very poorly informed on this topic, and it is unclear whether the level of public involvement exceeds the minimum threshold for such an important reform.⁴⁹

Within the sixth extended round of the Investment Framework for the Western Balkans, the Minister for European Integration and the National IPA Coordinator Jadranka Joksimović proposed, on behalf of the Government of Serbia, seven projects for the award of grants for investment grants. The total value of the proposed projects is 785.5 million EUR, of which 241.3 million EUR is a request for grants, the Ministry of European Integration announced. It is expected that the Steering Board of the Investment Framework for the Western Balkans will make an official decision on whether to support the above-mentioned proposals of the Government of Serbia in December 2021.⁵⁰

47 EWB: Predstavljen predlog akta o promeni Ustava, dolazak Venecijanske komisije krajem septembra, <https://bit.ly/2XBkYwt>, accessed on 18.09.2021.

48 YUCOM: Amendments to the Constitution in procedure again finally known what the changes are, <https://bit.ly/39obl1z>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

49 CCP. Small Steps and Unresolved Problems: The Report on Reforms in the Area of the Rule of Law in Serbia, October 2020 – June 2021, <https://bit.ly/3hSPut3>, accessed on 15.09.2021.

50 MEI, Latest news, Joksimović: Predloženo još sedam projekata za investicione grantove, <https://bit.ly/3tVvURY>, accessed on 20.09.2021.

Independent institutions

This section analyses the changes in the competences, organization, and personnel of the autonomous and independent state bodies that could have an impact on their status and work. Some of the activities of these institutions in cases of special importance for the state of democracy in Serbia are also included.

Amendments to relevant laws

In January 2021, the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government began drafting the new **Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance**, which, among other things, regulates the work of the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection. The process of amending this law has been going on since March 2018, and until the end of this reporting period, the law still has not entered the parliamentary procedure.

A new Working Group for drafting the law was formed in January 2021 without the involvement of civil society, which was subsequently rectified only after the reaction of the civil sector.⁵¹ During the period of public hearing⁵² in May and June, the Coalition for Freedom of Access to Information assessed that some of the amendments, if adopted, **would narrow the existing level of the right to free access to information** of public importance.⁵² On 26 July 2021, the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government published a revised version of the Law, which it sent for opinion to the competent state bodies, which is the most recent information on this Law in the reporting period.⁵³

Another law that is changing in the context of the rule of law reforms is the **Law on the Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman)**, which was last amended in 2007. The process of amending this law began in March 2021⁵⁴, and during the public debate, it was met with criticism regarding the potential weakening of the staff capacity of this institution. The

51 EWB: Crvene lampice u procesu izmene Zakona o pristupu informacijama, <https://bit.ly/3AEffoo>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

52 Partners Serbia: Call for support of proposals for improvement of the Draft Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, <https://bit.ly/3AFwPse>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

53 Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government: Draft Amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance, <https://bit.ly/3AF3LRN>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

54 Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government: Public consultations in the process of preparation of the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on the Protector of Citizens, <https://bit.ly/39zuBP5>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

draft law was also criticized by the union of employees of the Ombudsman office⁵⁵, and it has not yet entered the parliamentary procedure.

Based on this and previous editions of the State of Democracy in Serbia, it is noticeable that in recent years, **whenever the laws regulating the work of independent bodies were being amended, similar problems occurred**. In addition to the two laws covered in this edition, previous editions dealt with the Law on Personal Data Protection and the Law on Prevention of Corruption. In all four cases, representatives of civil society, and sometimes members of independent institutions themselves, assessed that **the opportunity to eliminate the existing problems was missed**, and in some cases, it was assessed that the **existing regulations were diminished**.

Personnel composition of institutions

In November 2020, at the suggestion of the parliamentary group "Aleksandar Vučić - For Our Children", Brankica Janković was re-elected as the only candidate to the position of the **Commissioner for the Protection of Equality**, six months after her first term expired.⁵⁶ The proposal for the election of the Commissioner by urgent procedure was determined by the Committee for Constitutional Issues and Legislation, three days before the vote in the plenum, and **only then was the identity of the candidate announced**, which prevented the interested public from thoroughly expressing their views on her.⁵⁷

The long-standing remark of the civil society that the former membership and activities of the **director of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption**, Dragan Sikimić, in the ruling Serbian Progressive Party were not examined, still did not produce any effect. On 11 March 2021, six months after the deadline, the National Assembly elected the members of the Council of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption. Previously, the organization Transparency Serbia assessed that the new law does not provide clear criteria for the election of members of the Council and does not guarantee their independence.⁵⁸

The case of the **Council for the Fight Against Corruption**, which is an expert-advisory body of the Government of Serbia, is significant. In March 2021, the Government refused to consider three of the five candidates for Council members, including University of

55 Danas: Novi zakon o zaštiti Zaštitnika građana, <https://bit.ly/3kDXAb2>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

56 Danas: Brankici Janković ističe mandat krajem maja, <https://bit.ly/3u9Z3J1>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

57 Committee for Human Rights Niš: Legal analysis of the election of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, <https://bit.ly/2XLQc46>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

58 Transparency Serbia: Election of Agency Council members - overdue obligations and unclear criteria, <https://bit.ly/3CNUUsQ5>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

Belgrade professors Ognjen Radonjić and Vladimir Obradović. The Government explained that the candidates were rejected because of “engaging in political activities”. Radonjić filed a complaint with the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, believing that he was discriminated against because of his political views and public statements.⁵⁹ After the death of Council member Jelisaveta Vasilić in June 2021, this body has **six members out of thirteen** as provided by the Decision on its formation⁶⁰, and the Government has not appointed any new members for nine years on the proposal of the Council.⁶¹

Another institution that has undergone changes in its composition is the **Fiscal Council**. In December 2020, Bojan Dimitrijević was elected a new member of the three-member body. His biography caused controversy due to the fact that he had been a member of the Serbian Progressive Party since 2008.⁶² Previously, MPs attacked the Fiscal Council, primarily its president Pavle Petrović, for criticizing some elements of the budget rebalance, as well as the decision to allocate 100 Euros to each adult citizen just before the June 2020 elections.⁶³

After five annual reports on the State of Democracy in Serbia, it is **noticeable that almost every election of new members of the independent institutions causes controversy regarding the impartiality of the candidates or the inclusiveness of the process**. Independence and impartiality of some of the candidates (Sikimić and Dimitrijević, mentioned above, as well as the President of the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media Olivera Zekić⁶⁴) were questioned, while in other cases the opinion of civil society was obstructed, ignored, or rejected (candidate for the Commissioner for Free Access to Information Nevena Ružić in 2019⁶⁵, the mentioned cases of Janković, Radonjić and Obradović). Both of these trends are worrying because of the position that independent and autonomous bodies should have in the political system of Serbia, which implies complete personal independence and impartiality of the members of these bodies, as well as the enjoyment of trust in the general public.

59 N1: Kabinet premijerke odbio tri predloga Saveta, „nepodoban“ i profesor fakulteta, <https://bit.ly/3kFOB9k>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

60 Government of the Republic of Serbia: Decision on the formation of the Anti-Corruption Council, <https://bit.ly/39xYZtp>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

61 N1: Da li Vlada sprema katanac za Savet za borbu protiv korupcije?, <https://bit.ly/3IXCvHL>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

62 Istinomer: Bojan Dimitrijević, <https://bit.ly/3i7ic9N>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

63 N1: Poslanik SNS “ne veruje u dobre namere” Fiskalnog saveta i naziva ih nezalicama, <https://bit.ly/3IYKnc2>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

64 See the chapter Freedom of Expression.

65 Centre for Contemporary Politics: State of Democracy in Serbia 2019, page 13, <https://bit.ly/3ES942s>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

Activities of independent institutions

Last year's edition of the State of Democracy in Serbia included several cases dealt with by the Ombudsman, which, as relevant indicators of the state of democracy in the country, attracted public attention. This included cases of "torchlights" in late April and early May 2020 and police behaviour during protests in July of that year. The Ombudsman continued to deal with these cases during this reporting period. It is noticeable that it took several months to determine that in both cases there were violations in the work of the police – six months in the case of "torchlights"⁶⁶ and eight in the case of protests.⁶⁷ Also, the recommendations of the Ombudsman referred only to the future prevention of similar cases, and not to the determination of responsibility and potential sanctioning of these violations. It can be concluded that the reaction of this institution was too slow and too mild, given the importance of these cases for the public in Serbia.

The Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection continued to face a number of cases of inability to enforce his decisions during the reporting period. In the report for 2020, the Commissioner stated that the Government continues to disregard the legal obligation to ensure the execution of its decisions through direct implementation. Since 2010, the government has not provided enforcement in any of the 340 cases, including 46 in 2020 - one of the cases concerned the price of a monument to Stefan Nemanja in Belgrade, which attracted special public attention.⁶⁸

66 Ombudsman: Ineffective police response to gatherings of unknown persons on the roofs of buildings, <https://bit.ly/2Zo52P7>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

67 Ombudsman: Establish responsibility for illegal and improper conduct of police officers, <https://bit.ly/3lUFhgX>, accessed on 21.09.2021.

68 Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection, 2020 Report, page 27 <https://bit.ly/3uajd5Q>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

4. Civil society

Although certain measures towards greater involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs) in the process of drafting certain regulations have been formally taken, the civic space in Serbia continues the **trend of narrowing**. Constant **pressures, intimidation, undermining the activities of CSOs, damaging their reputation** through activities of government organised non-governmental organizations (GONGO), but also through the statements of state officials continue.

There has been no significant improvement in the position of CSOs in Serbia compared to the previous year, and as noted by the global network of civil society organizations - CIVICUS, the space for the activities of civil society organizations in Serbia is "**obstructed**".⁶⁹ Thus, Serbia is still in the category of countries where CSOs exist, but their work is "heavily contested by power holders, who impose a combination of legal and practical constraints on the full enjoyment of fundamental rights."⁷⁰

The European Commission recognized that the position of the CSOs in Serbia is unfavourable as well. In its 2020 Report on Serbia, the European Commission emphasized that further efforts are needed to ensure systematic cooperation between the government and civil society, and that it is necessary to establish an encouraging environment for the development and financing of civil society.⁷¹

Among the numerous examples of pressure on the CSOs, probably the most important is the "**List**" case, one of the most serious examples of endangering their freedom of action that occurred in the previous reporting period, but the failure to resolve it took place in this one. Although the European Commission called on the authorities to clarify why individuals and CSOs were on the "List" of the Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering (APML) of the Ministry of Finance, the competent institutions did not provide an explanation on what basis individuals and CSOs were asked for financial transactions. In January 2021, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), in a procedure initiated by the United Nations Special Rapporteurs and at the request of the organizations and media from the "List", concluded that **the state has no right to exercise such control** unless there is a reasonable suspicion that someone is involved in the financing of terrorism, which has not

69 Civicus Rating for Serbia, last update on 08.06.2021. <https://bit.ly/3CDrFgN>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

70 Civicus ratings, <https://bit.ly/3Claqef>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

71 European Commission, Serbia 2020 Report, p. 12, <https://bit.ly/3zBdXcr>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

happened in any single case.⁷² Despite the requests of CSOs for the APML to declare that these organizations operate in accordance with the law, and to adopt the necessary steps to repair the damage caused to them, this did not happen. Moreover, the smear campaign of undermining the work of civil society organizations and individuals has continued.

The culmination happened in March 2021, when during the Parliament session, Aleksandar Martinović, the head of the parliamentary group "Aleksandar Vučić - For our children", presented accusations against the non-governmental organization Crta. He described the organization as involved in an attempted coup and assassination of the president and accused its directors Raša Nedeljkov and Vukosava Crnjanski of driving expensive cars and living in luxury apartments, revealing where Vukosava Crnjanski lives and the type of car she drives.⁷³ By revealing information about the representatives of Crta, Martinović led to the possibility of **endangering the physical safety of the mentioned persons**. After the reactions of the civil society organizations, the attacks were condemned by several foreign embassies.⁷⁴

Members of the European Parliament adopted amendments to the EP Resolution on Serbia, which states that the European Parliament is appalled by the orchestrated attacks of certain members of the Serbian Parliament and pro-government tabloids against investigative journalists and members of civil society.⁷⁵ The Belgrade Centre for Security Policy decided to end the communication and co-operation with the National Assembly, explaining in a statement that co-operation with institutions calling for violence is not possible.⁷⁶

The reaction of President Aleksandar Vučić followed these disapprovals. In his interview for RTS, he asked the members of the Parliament not to attack the mentioned organizations, although **he has not been thrilled with their work either**.⁷⁷

Members of the Serbian Parliament are not the only representatives of the ruling parties in Serbia who, despite numerous negative reactions, have continued to disrespect members

72 Građanske inicijative, Tri slobode pod lupom: Prikaz slučajeva kršenja ljudskih prava u Srbiji 15-28. januar 2021. godine, <https://bit.ly/3kxD0cf>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

73 EWB: Oštre reakcije nakon napada skupštinskoj sali na KRIK i CRTA-u, <https://bit.ly/3AAvenq>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

74 Koalicija PrEUgovor, PrEUgovor Alarm izveštaj, May 2021, p. 29, <https://bit.ly/3o1K5Us>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

75 EWB: Oštre reakcije nakon napada u skupštinskoj sali na KRIK i CRTA-u, <https://bit.ly/3AAvenq>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

76 BCBP. Cooperation with institutions that call for violence is not possible, <https://bit.ly/2WbFxQ4>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

77 EWB: Oštre reakcije nakon napada u skupštinskoj sali na KRIK i CRTA-u, <https://bit.ly/3AAvenq>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

of CSOs and their work. Thus, the Minister of the Interior, Aleksandar Vulin, joined the supporters of right-wing nationalist organizations in Serbia and on the anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, stated that activist Nataša Kandić, from the Humanitarian Law Centre, "deserves contempt of Serbian people."⁷⁸

Goran Vesić, the deputy mayor of Belgrade, commenting on an analysis published by Transparency Serbia regarding the rigged public bidding for the lease of a sports complex in Dorćol for the next 20 years, accused this organization's program director, Nemanja Nenadić, of "wanting to banish Đoković from Serbia with his lies"⁷⁹, even though Novak Đoković is not mentioned in the analysis. The President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, after the decision of the private company Twitter from the middle of August 2021 to label the numerous accounts of media in Serbia as "state affiliated", launched a broad campaign against civil society organizations and professional media, accusing them of not paying tax, adding that they protested when they had to pay it.⁸⁰

After the criticism by civil society organizations directed against the Draft amendments to the Law on Internal Affairs,⁸¹ the Minister of the Interior, Aleksandar Vulin, stated that the mentioned Draft will be withdrawn, at the request of the President of Serbia. On that occasion, Vulin stated that the Serbian Ministry of the Interior had obtained information that several foreign intelligence services, through their network in the media, non-governmental organizations and political parties, had made media preparations for violent protests aimed at destabilizing the country.⁸²

These statements were accompanied by **discreditation of CSOs in pro-government tabloids**. Thus, after the allegations of the President of Serbia that CSOs do not pay taxes, *Srpski telegraf*, together with other pro-government media, joined the campaign against CSOs by publishing a special article on financing the CSOs and alleged links between them and foreigners.⁸³

78 Novosti: Ministar Vulin: Nataša Kandić zaslužuje prezir srpskog naroda, <https://bit.ly/3zDdCGh>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

79 Informer: Hoće da oteraju Novaka iz Srbije! Vesić odgovorio na optužbe o tenderu!, <https://bit.ly/3kAcM96>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

80 EWB: Otvoreno pismo: Ministarka Čomić da osudi napade na medije i civilno društvo, <https://bit.ly/3i2W3JU>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

81 Istinomer: Šta je sve sporno u Nacrtu zakona o unutrašnjim poslovima?, <https://bit.ly/2W3QXVO>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

82 Danas: Povučen Nacrt zakona o unutrašnjim poslovima, <https://bit.ly/3lXyAuS>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

83 Danas: Vučićev bilten - Srpski telegraf u kampanji protiv profesionalnih medija, <https://bit.ly/3AC6lCy>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

It is important to say that phantom portals, such as *Prismotra* which has been deactivated, also continue to play a significant role in undermining the work of CSOs. After publishing the report *State of Democracy in Serbia for 2020*, *Prismotra* branded its authors as Western snitches in Serbia and published their biographies.⁸⁴ This portal very often published data from the personal lives of members of the civil society. Although it was shut down in the meantime, a very similar portal called *Nije lepo ćutati* appeared and attacks on the members of civil society continued.⁸⁵

Orchestrated attacks on representatives of civil society organizations represent an additional obstacle to the already insufficient cooperation between CSOs and state institutions. The institutional narrowing of the space for possible cooperation occurred with the **abolition of the Office for Cooperation with the Civil Society** in October 2020.⁸⁶ This body, whose function was to coordinate the work of the civil and all parts of the public sector, was disbanded in a non-transparent manner and without consulting CSOs. Its former responsibilities were transferred to the **newly formed Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue**.

The new Ministry, whose responsibility is to provide the basic conditions for the work of civil society before starting any process that would promote a supportive environment, **declared itself as not competent to deal with cases of attacks and pressure on CSOs** at the very beginning of its work.⁸⁷ Such a situation has led to the refusal of CSOs to participate in the process of drafting the Strategy for a Stimulating Environment for the Development of Civil Society.

Following a call from the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue to CSOs for proposals and comments on the Strategy, in July 2021, 24 CSOs reaffirmed their statement that they would not participate in the process of drafting the Strategy. As they stated, the failure to resolve the "List" affair, constant disrespect of the Code of Ethics of the National Assembly and the tabloid campaign against them, led to the decision made in April 2021 regarding non-participation in drafting the Strategy remain unchanged.⁸⁸

84 RTP. Ovo su doušnici Zapada u Srbiji!, <https://bit.ly/2XNDstN>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

85 Koalicija PrEUgovor, PrEUgovor Alarm izveštaj, may 2021, p.28, <https://bit.ly/3CJZBIV>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

86 Građanske inicijative: I dalje bez uslova za učešće OCD u izradi Strategije za podsticajno okruženje za civilno društvo, <https://bit.ly/3kzYRQr>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

87 Građanske inicijative: I dalje bez uslova za učešće OCD u izradi Strategije za podsticajno okruženje za civilno društvo, <https://bit.ly/3o1UwaQ>, accessed on 23.09.2021

88 Ibid.

The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue has formally taken certain steps towards greater involvement of CSOs. Thus, in parallel with the attacks on CSOs, this Ministry often invited organizations to participate in consultations on public policies documents, strategies, and laws.

However, despite such calls, some of the Ministry's actions call into question the sincerity of the intention to reach common results. First, the **deadlines** set for public consultations or public debates are **often too short** for constructive and productive engagement of civil society organizations, especially when several documents are to be discussed in parallel.⁸⁹

In addition to the time limit, there is also a limitation to the **availability of information**. In mid-June 2021, the Terrorist Financing Risk Assessment Working Group and the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue invited civil society organizations to complete the Questionnaire for assessing the vulnerability of the non-profit sector due to terrorist financing without presenting them the purpose and the process of the assessment, data collection methodologies and their subsequent use.⁹⁰ A possible meeting with CSOs was announced after filling in the Questionnaire, and the absence of key information and agreements on the manner of cooperation leads to the conclusion that this is an attempt to simulate cooperation without real efforts of the Ministry to reach a final risk assessment through joint work of all institutions and CSOs.

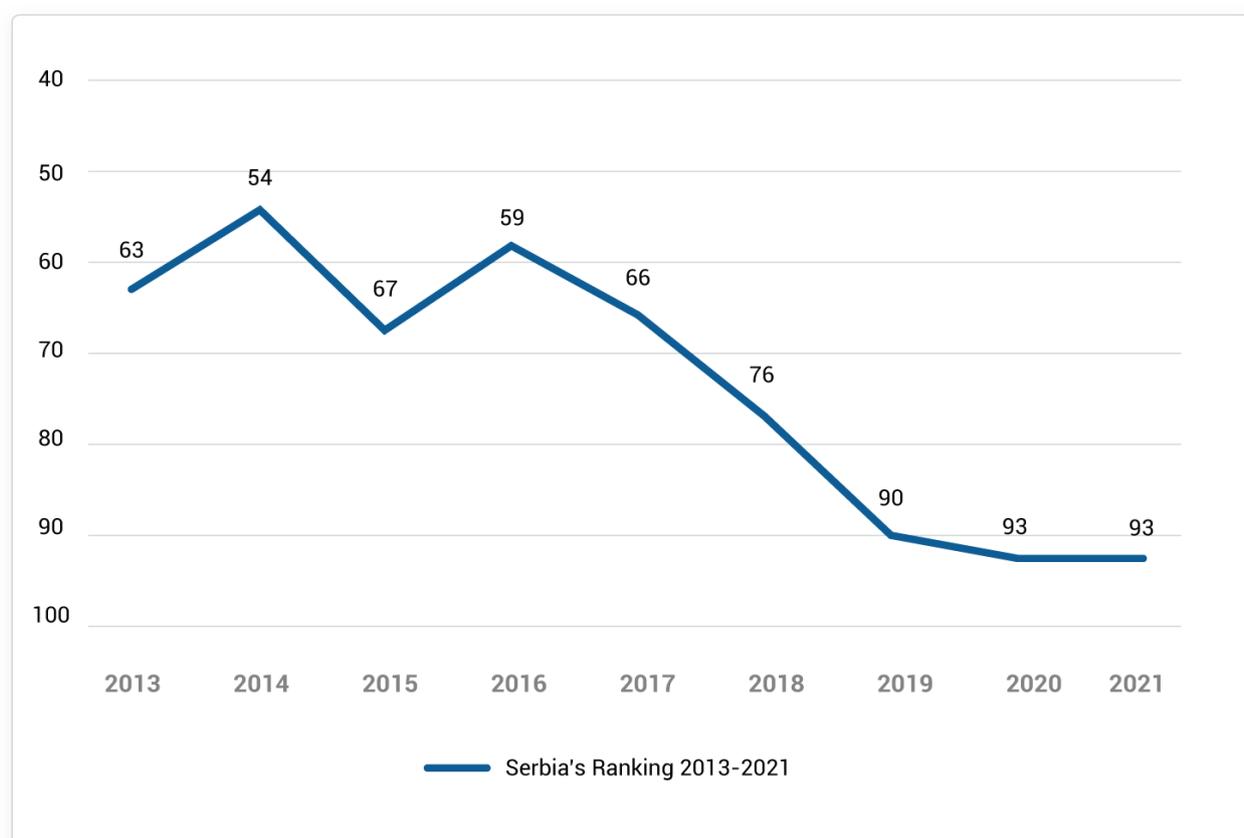
⁸⁹ Koalicija PrEUgovor, PrEUgovor Alarm izveštaj, may 2021, p. 27, <https://bit.ly/3zzO5Om>, accessed on 23.09.2021.

⁹⁰ Građanske inicijative: Vlada Srbije simulira dijalog sa građanskim društvom o sprečavanju finansiranja terorizma, <https://bit.ly/2XEtMSs>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

5. Freedom of expression

In 2021, Serbia has not made any progress on the world media freedom lists. According to the Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, Serbia ranked 93rd in 2021, just like the previous year.⁹¹ RWB points out that early 2021 saw significant progress in the fight against impunity when the instigator and two perpetrators of the 2018 arson attack on journalist Milan Jovanović's home were sentenced to four years in prison, while the case of Serbia's most famous whistleblower, Aleksandar Obradović was presented as a setback, who continues to be the subject of prosecution despite the lack of evidence against him.⁹² On the other hand, Freedom House's report states that journalists are often exposed to physical attacks, libel, unjustified tax inspections, and other forms of pressure.⁹³ The V-Dem Institute states that Serbia has fallen behind in terms of media freedom as well.⁹⁴

Graph 5.1 Serbia's ranking in the World Press Freedom Indexes of Reporters Without Borders 2013 – 2021



91 Reporters Without Border, World Press Freedom Index, <https://bit.ly/3nQv7Rh>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

92 Ibid.

93 Freedom House, Freedom in the World, <https://bit.ly/2XFBSdJ>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

94 V-Dem Institute, Democracy Report 2021, <https://bit.ly/3CCKYXJ>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic made the work of journalists more difficult this year as well. Although at the beginning of 2021, the Government of Serbia took a significant step towards the protection of journalists, recognizing media workers as essential workers during the pandemic, and placing them among the priority groups for vaccination, journalists faced numerous other obstacles. Some of them were the inability to obtain timely information, the increase in the number of false news, as well as the polarization of public opinion, which led to an increase in the number of threats to journalists who are reporting on the pandemic.⁹⁵

Intimidation of journalists and media organisations

From October 2020 to September 2021, the Regional Platform for Media Freedom and Security of Journalists (safejournalists.net) recorded **51 attacks on journalists**, from verbal threats and death threats to physical attacks and cases of attacks on media outlets and organizations.⁹⁶ Compared to the previous State of Democracy report, **the number of attacks is almost three times smaller.**⁹⁷

From death threats sent through social media accounts, such as the case of threatening the Editor-in-chief of CINS Milica Šarić⁹⁸ and CINS organisation, stating that they are **“Soros’ mercenaries and that justice will be served to them”**⁹⁹, as well as the case of threats to the Program Director of the Independent Journalists’ Association of Vojvodina and university Professor Dinko Gruhonjić¹⁰⁰, and attacks on media workers’ exhibition spaces¹⁰¹, to physical attacks - like the attack on the Radio Host Daško Milinović¹⁰², journalists continue to face serious intimidation.

Media organizations were also exposed to numerous pressures and campaigns directed against them by members of the National Assembly. One of the examples is when the MP of the Serbian Progressive Party, Biljana Pantić Pilja, in December 2020 in the National

⁹⁵ Građanske Inicijative, „Tri slobode pod lupom – 6-19. novembar 2020“, <https://bit.ly/2W9hcua>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

⁹⁶ Safe Journalists, <https://bit.ly/3CITIRJ>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

⁹⁷ Centar savremene politike, „Stanje demokratije u Srbiji 2020“, <https://bit.ly/2XHcqns>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

⁹⁸ Cenzolovka: Pretnje urednici CINS-a, <https://bit.ly/39v6EIH>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Cenzolovka: NDNV: Nove pretnje smrću Dinku Gruhonjiću, <https://bit.ly/3CJVP2h>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹⁰¹ N1: Huligani upali na izložbu stripova, <https://bit.ly/3lSZrYU>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹⁰² Cenzolovka: Daško Milinović žrtva terora, <https://bit.ly/3Aw9o10>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

Assembly referred to N1 and Nova S television channels as anti-Serbian media, domestic traitors and foreign mercenaries.¹⁰³ The Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK) was also attacked by MPs and tabloids, who repeatedly stated that KRIK is connected to one organized criminal group.¹⁰⁴ Numerous CSOs condemned these attacks, as well as the European Parliament which included in the final text of the Report on Serbia a condemnation of the attack on KRIK.¹⁰⁵

Phantom portals started to emerge as a relatively new form of intimidation and pressure on the media. The phantom portals take over the complete visual identity of the media, with the intention to undermine citizens' trust in the attacked media. Portal Južne vesti is the latest example of identity copying. The same happened to the portals Ozon Press, in 2020 and Kolubarske, in 2017.¹⁰⁶ The reaction to this form of attack on the media also came from Reporters Without Borders, who asked the Minister of Culture and Information, Maja Gojković, to support the journalists, and the authorities to act on the complaint submitted by Južne vesti.¹⁰⁷

The regulatory environment and the work of independent institutions

With a half-year delay, at the beginning of December 2020, **the Government of Serbia 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.**¹⁰⁸ As stated, the general goal of the Strategy is "to improve the public information system that guarantees freedom of expression, freedom of the media, security of journalists, media pluralism, a developed media market and a strengthened journalistic profession."¹⁰⁹ The action plan foresees the amendments to 13 laws in the next two years, among which the most changes are dedicated to the Law on Public Information and Media, followed by the Law on Electronic

¹⁰³ Nova: Poslanica SNS crta metu novinarima N1 i Nove, <https://bit.ly/39untUb>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹⁰⁴ Safe Journalists, <https://bit.ly/3zuypOk>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹⁰⁵ EWB: Evropski parlament usvojio amandman o napadima na KRIK i CRTU, <https://bit.ly/39x84CE>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹⁰⁶ Južne vesti: Lažni sajt Južnih vesti još jedan način za obračunavanje sa profesionalnim medijima, <https://bit.ly/2ZqjbeT>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹⁰⁷ Glas Amerike: Srbija, mediji, klevete, kampanja, <https://bit.ly/2XJO6Ct>, accessed on 30. septembra 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Culture and Information: Action Plan for Media Strategy adopted, <https://bit.ly/3ucut1x>, accessed on 30. septembra 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Action Plan for the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025, <https://bit.ly/3zE3kWm>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

Media and the Law on Public Media Services. Media organizations pointed out that the Action Plan is good, but its implementation will depend on the political will.¹¹⁰

Of the 10 goals that are planned to be accomplished by October 2021, among which are the analysis of regulatory frameworks, media market, media content, media literacy, as well as improving the staff, organizational and technical capacity of the Ministry of Culture and Information, the most important results that were achieved so far are deleting the News Agency Tanjug from the Register of Business Entities, removing the media whose publisher was Tanjug from the Media Register, as well as amending the Law on Budget System.¹¹¹

In December 2020, the Government of Serbia formed two working groups - the Working Group for Security and Protection of Journalists and the Working Group for Monitoring and Implementation of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Country until 2025. The task of the Working Group for Safety and Protection of Journalists is to increase the efficiency of response in cases of attacks on journalists, as well as to monitor the actions taken to protect their safety. At the end of January, the Working Group for Security and Protection of Journalists, together with the Government of Serbia, established a website and application "**Safe Journalist**", and an **SOS telephone** for issues of endangering physical safety, which will be available to all journalists.¹¹²

In mid-March, **six journalists' associations withdrew from the Working Group for the Safety and Protection of Journalists**. The reasons given are "attacks on KRIK, but also continuous attacks on members of these associations in the media that violate the Code of Journalists of Serbia, and which remain without adequate reaction, not only from the Government of Serbia but also from relevant ministries, the National Assembly and Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media (REM).¹¹³ In mid-May, representatives of six journalist associations¹¹⁴ formed the **Coalition for Media Freedom**, which will fight for the safety of journalists,

110 EWB: REM kao ključ slobode medija i međustranačkog dijaloga, <https://bit.ly/3lUArjO>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

111 Action Plan for the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025, <https://bit.ly/3zE3kWm>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

112 N1: Utvrđen plan rada Radne grupe za bezbednost i zaštitu novinara u Srbiji, <https://bit.ly/3kzStZb>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

113 N1: Više novinarskih udruženja istupilo iz Radne grupe za bezbednost novinara, <https://bit.ly/3zGfOgo>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

114 Media Association, Online Media Association (AOM), Independent Journalists' Association Vojvodina (NDNV), Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS), Business Association of Local and Independent Media "Local Press" and Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation.

freedom of information and independence, and improving professionalism in the media sphere.¹¹⁵

Progress in strengthening the independence of the REM has not been made in this period either. After the expiration of the mandate of the member of the REM Council, Olivera Zekić, she was re-elected by the nomination of the Serbian Progressive Party, and later she was also elected the President of the REM Council.¹¹⁶ CSOs reacted negatively to the election.¹¹⁷ Later on, Slobodan Cvejić resigned as a member of the Council, citing violations of the REM Statute and democratic principles during the election of the new President to the REM Council as reasons for his resignation.¹¹⁸

Criticisms of REM's work have been made on several occasions during this reporting period. Strong reactions followed the publication of photos of the victims of suspected members of an organized criminal group at a press conference that was broadcasted live on numerous televisions with national coverage. REM members decided by a majority vote that there was no public disturbance and that this case did not require a reaction from this regulatory body.¹¹⁹

Public broadcasting and economic factors

In the final months of 2020, public attention was focused on the issue of financing RTS and RTV. The combined model of financing public media services, partly from the budget and partly from taxes, lasted from 2016 and was supposed to last until the end of 2020, after which they would be financed exclusively from taxes.¹²⁰ However, the day after the National Assembly adopted the budget for 2021, the Law on Amendments to the Law on Public Media Services was introduced, it foresees that, both public services will be partially

115 Danas: Potpisan Memorandum o saradnji Koalicije za slobodu medija, <https://bit.ly/3kAdGIT>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

116 CCP. Small Steps and Unresolved Problems: The Report on Reforms in the Area of the Rule of Law in Serbia, October 2020 – June 2021, <https://bit.ly/3hSPut3>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

117 Cenzolovka: BIRIODI: Izbori predsednice i zamenika predsednika Saveta REM-a izvršeni po neusklađenim aktima, <https://bit.ly/3CTtJ4L>, accessed 24.09.2021.

118 Danas: Olivera Zekić izabrana na nekom drugom mestu, <https://bit.ly/3CEE6t0>, accessed 24.09.2021.

119 Cenzolovka: Olja Zekić: Vučić nije uznemirio javnost odsečenim glavama, <https://bit.ly/3CvMhaW>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

120 Cenzolovka: RTS i budžet previd težak više milijardi, <https://bit.ly/3o1J6n9>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

financed from the budget by December 31, 2021. The experts pointed out that this is just another of the authorities' pressures on editorial policy.¹²¹

The question of pressures on editorial policy was further triggered by BIRODI's research. The analysis of the monitoring of the RTS Dnevnik (prime time daily news), in the period from March 15 to April 30, 2021, showed that the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, was presented for two hours and nine minutes without a single second of criticism.¹²² **Experts have warned that this is a clear indication that RTS is not a public service of citizens, as it allows the promotion of the ruling party and does not sufficiently address criticism.** Another BIRODI's survey showed that from December 1 to April 30, almost 50 hours of news program of the leading televisions in Serbia - RTS, Pink, Happy, Prva B92 and N1, was dedicated to the President of Serbia, where he was positively represented 85% of the time.

In February 2021, Dragan Bujošević was elected for the second five-year term as the General Director of RTS. During his first term, Bujošević's work was regularly criticized by the opposition and CSOs, accusing him of the lack of pluralism on the public broadcaster. The REM Council elected six new members of the RTS Management Board in July 2021, and Branislav Klanšček was elected President of the Board. In 2020, he was a member of the Supervisory Board of the National Assembly established in the context of the June elections, and the work of this body was described by the ODIHR report as "passive".

In mid-August, **Twitter marked the accounts of Kurir, Prva, RTV, RTS Vesti, Tanjug, Informer, Srpski Telegraf, Politika, Television Happy, Pink.rs and B92 news with the badge "Serbia government-affiliated media"**. A strong reaction followed from RTS, which pointed out that the decision was unfounded and political, and that it will not publish its content on Twitter accounts that were marked "with any badge behind which RTS does not stand, nor did it choose during registration of the account."¹²³

The media in Serbia encountered numerous obstacles in this reporting period as well, from economic pressures through co-financing of media content to SLAPP lawsuits, restrictions on media pluralism and the decline of free competition in the media market.

Examples of misuse of funds for project co-financing of media content, which were awarded to media close to the government, pro-government tabloids or frequent violators of the

¹²¹ Danas: Pooštravanje kontrole vlasti nad uređivanjem RTS i RTV, <https://bit.ly/3u3auSM>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹²² N1: BIRODI: Za Vučića ni sekunda kritike u dnevniku RTS-a a za Đilasa 30 odsto, <https://bit.ly/3i05jhX>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹²³ RTS: Odluka Tvitera je neutemeljena i politička, nećemo objavljivati tamo dok se ne promeni, <https://bit.ly/3Cz6pc0>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

Journalists' Code, to the detriment of critical media, appeared in numerous competitions throughout Serbia.¹²⁴

Some media were not spared from **SLAPP lawsuits**, such as the Info Vranjska and JUGpress portals, which faced lawsuits for alleged reputation damage in the amount from 100,000 to 200,000 EUR, by the Millennium Team, that came after these portals published the statements of the People's Party officials. An additional lawsuit was filed against the Editor-in-chief of the Info Vranjske, as well as the publisher of the portal, with a lawsuit of 2,000,000 RSD.^{125 126} The experts assessed that the lawsuit was inappropriate as those portals had not been asked to publish a correction of the news.¹²⁷ The Niveus Team filed a lawsuit for damages against five journalists, the editor-in-chief and the publisher of the Vojvodina Research and Analytical Center (VOICE), in the amount of one million dinars each, for publishing a text about suspicious public procurements.¹²⁸

This year, the trend of limiting media pluralism in the media market continues. **The Media Pluralism Monitor report shows that media market concentration has a high risk for media pluralism.**¹²⁹

At the beginning of 2021, information appeared in the public that Telekom Srbija, which is mostly state-owned, will establish cooperation with Telenor, to allegedly reduce the market share of cable operator SBB to 30%¹³⁰, which broadcasts channels such as N1, Nova S and Newxmax Adria, one of the few in Serbia that are not characterized as pro-regime. Neither Telenor nor Telekom Srbija have denied these allegations.¹³¹ The domestic and international public have warned that this agreement could have negative consequences for media pluralism and further increase state influence on the media.¹³²

¹²⁴ Novi Pazar, Trstenik, Bor, Smederevo, Temerin, Užice, Niš, Pančevo, Sombor i Beograd. For more information, please check Cenzolovka: <https://bit.ly/3u3ftmG>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹²⁵ NUNS: Još jedna tužba – Osnivači Milenijum tima tužili izdavača portala Info Vranjske, <https://bit.ly/3u6Ge9H>, pristupljeno 24.09.2021.

¹²⁶ UGpress: Millenium team tužio i Info Vranjske, <https://bit.ly/3zAce7e>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹²⁷ Građanske inicijative, „Tri slobode – 26. mart-8. april“, <https://bit.ly/2ZjPzzz>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹²⁸ N1: VOICE primio dve tužbe zbog teksta kažu pritisak vlasti na medije, <https://bit.ly/3CGxjPg>, accessed on 30.09.2021.

¹²⁹ European University Institute, "Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era - Country report: Serbia", <https://bit.ly/3o1tBf2>, accessed on 24.09.2021..

¹³⁰ N1: Pakleni plan – Telekom i Telenor se udružuju da bi uništili slobodne medije, <https://bit.ly/39yq9jz>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹³¹ N1: Telekom i Telenor ne demantuju saznanja N1 o planu uništenja SBB i slobodnih medija, <https://bit.ly/3EDhgUe>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

¹³² EWB: Da li Telenor i Telekom ugrožavaju slobodnu konkurenciju na medijskom tržištu u Srbiji, <https://bit.ly/3CEf115>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

In mid-May, TV Euronews Serbia began broadcasting its program in Serbia. Although the government announced that their start of work would mean more media pluralism in Serbia¹³³, experts warned that it was a continuation of practices that violate the law, since the state should not have an ownership share in the media, and that Telekom Srbija, although a shareholder society, is mostly state-owned. Experts believe that this influence of Telekom Serbia could consequently harm media freedom.¹³⁴ The arrival of the new television in public was understood as the creation of direct competition with critical media, and it was noticed that a significant number of journalists from these media started working for the new television.

At the end of April, the United Media Group announced that it would start printing the daily Nova and called for printing houses to submit their offers for printing. However, after months of unsuccessful attempts, they informed the public that none of the six printing houses with which they were negotiating agreed to print the newspapers.¹³⁵ **Experts assessed that it was a matter of political pressure.**¹³⁶ After several months of attempts, the Nova newspaper started printing in late June in Osijek, because no printing house in Serbia wanted to establish cooperation.¹³⁷

In mid-July, Telekom Srbija bought the rights to broadcast the English Premier League on Arena Sport for an alleged 100 million EUR per season over the next six years, almost ten times more than the Sport Club had previously paid, which is owned by United Group. This raised a number of questions from where the state got the money from, to what are the motives behind such a decision. Some experts point out that the motives are purely political, and that they are aiming to destroy private companies and expand the political influence of President Vučić in the country and the region.¹³⁸

133 Fonet: Vera u evropsku budućnost, <https://bit.ly/3ACDa7R>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

134 BIRN: Pakt Euronews-a i Telekom: Zakon u raljama politike, <https://bit.ly/2XRYPL4>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

135 N1: Javni poziv za štampanje novina Nova, <https://bit.ly/2XSwKTR>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

136 Euractiv: Printing houses in Serbia refuse to publish new daily newspaper, <https://bit.ly/3ELyf6L>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

137 Nova: Prvi broj lista nova, <https://bit.ly/3ucRCkr>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

138 N1: Milosavljević: 600 miliona za Premijer ligu, <https://bit.ly/3lUYi2Q>, accessed on 24.09.2021.

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



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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.



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