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Freedom House

Nations in Transit 2020 - Serbia

Transitional or Hybrid Regime

49

100

Democracy Percentage 49.40 100

Democracy Score 3.96 7

Last Year's Democracy Percentage & Status

50 100 Transitional or Hybrid Regime

The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The Democracy Percentage, introduced in 2020, is a translation of the Democracy Score to the 0-100 scale, where 0 equals least democratic and 100 equals most democratic.

Score changes in 2020

- Corruption rating declined from 4.25 to 4.50 due to the cumulative increase in high-level corruption coupled with the absence, and in some cases actual dismantlement, of policies and institutions that would successfully fight or prevent corruption.

Executive Summary

By Miloš Damjanović

The state of Serbia's democratic institutions and freedoms continued to deteriorate in 2019, resulting in the country's lowest democracy score in *Nations in Transit* since 2001. Although the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) came to power in 2012 in large part on the wings of its promise to energetically fight widespread corruption, it has failed to do so over the years. By 2019, high-level corruption had become more entrenched, with the country's already fragile anticorruption institutions and policies further undermined.

The year was marked not so much by important individual events but by ongoing processes and trends. As 2018 drew to an end, one event set the scene for the start of 2019. In November, just before an opposition meeting in the town of Kruševac, one of the leaders of the opposition coalition Alliance for Serbia (SzS), Borko Stefanović was attacked and beaten, leaving him bloodied. In many ways, the attack was the last straw for government critics. Opposition leaders blamed Serbian president and SNS leader Aleksandar Vučić for creating a contentious climate in which violence against political opponents had moved from the verbal to the physical level. This visibly struck a chord with many ordinary citizens across the country, and spontaneous demonstrations against political violence broke out in the capital Belgrade just days after the attack. The protests continued to grow organically in the first months of 2019 and spread to dozens of towns across Serbia.

All of this brought into focus not just the general political climate in Serbia but also concerns over media freedom, political control, and the free and fair conduct of elections, among other issues. Protesters and opposition leaders quickly focused their requests on demanding a more even political playing field, in line with basic democratic norms, as a necessity for genuinely free and, particularly, fair elections. Crucially, both demonstrators and opposition politicians coalesced around the idea of conditioning their participation in democratic institutions—from parliament to elections—on these demands. In February, opposition groups launched a boycott of the parliament and also threatened to boycott the upcoming elections if demands were not met.

This development led to a radicalization of Serbia's political climate. At the same time, it also focused much-needed attention on the country's increasing slide towards authoritarianism. By making it clear they would no longer play the political game according to existing rules, opposition parties held out the threat that they would deprive a future SNS-led government of democratic legitimacy through their electoral boycott. The SNS initially rejected most of these demands, claiming the

opposition's problem was not the rules under which the political contest would be conducted but, rather, its lack of popularity among voters. Nevertheless, it was clear that the SNS did not want a complete opposition boycott of the parliamentary elections, due in 2020, primarily because this could jeopardize the ruling party's external legitimacy.

While the opposition appealed to European Union (EU) representatives and Western governments to exercise their leverage over the Serbian government to create a more democratic political environment, the EU and other Western actors showed little appetite for getting seriously involved in a domestic political problem. In July, a dialogue was launched between ruling and opposition parties, mediated by the Serbian Open Society Fund and the Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences. However, finding the atmosphere less than constructive, the SzS quickly abandoned the dialogue. EU efforts to mediate the political standoff were stepped up in the fall but yielded little—as the year drew to a close, most opposition parties seemed set on boycotting the upcoming parliamentary elections despite the determination of the SNS to co-opt smaller parties into taking part.

In terms of the overall quality of democracy and conditions under which electoral contests take place, one of the biggest problems facing Serbia is the deterioration of media freedoms. The majority of Serbia's print and electronic media remain under control of the ruling SNS. At their worst, media such as TV Pink and the tabloid *Informer* serve as SNS propaganda outlets used to praise the ruling party and its leader, while demonizing critics and opponents. In less-extreme cases, such as the public broadcaster RTS or broadsheet *Politika*, they offer more subtle progovernment coverage coupled with extremely limited space for opposition activities. While critical voices, such as cable news channel N1 or the daily *Danas*, do exist, their reach is limited. Media outlets with wide reach offering anything close to balanced political coverage are extremely rare. In 2019, attacks and threats continued against journalists critical of the government.

Weak rule of law and widespread corruption remain among the biggest obstacles to good governance in Serbia and, increasingly, these conditions are holding back economic growth in the country. During its rise to power, the ruling SNS, and Aleksandar Vučić in particular, devoted much attention to their plans and efforts to roll back corruption and strengthen the rule of law. Seven years into the SNS's rule, it is evident that successive governments dominated by the party have progressively pulled back from "talking the talk" of fighting corruption and strengthening the rule of law, and have done very little to "walk the walk" overall. In its latest report on the state of the rule of law in Serbia, finalized in November 2019, the European Commission noted that the process of adopting constitutional amendments aimed at improving judicial independence was on hold, while the current legal and constitutional framework had created the space for political influence over the judiciary. The Commission also assessed that there were serious delays in coordinating anticorruption policies and adopting key pieces of legislation aimed at rolling back corruption.

On a practical level, while there has been some small improvement in the number of investigations and prosecutions of low-level corruption, nothing has been done to rein in high-level corruption. With few investigations, let alone convictions, the problem of high-level corruption appears to be worsening. Scandals uncovered by journalists are routinely ignored by investigators, while ruling party officials and affiliated tabloids do their best to discredit the investigative journalists themselves. Just as worrying was the case of a whistleblower—Aleksandar Obradović, an employee of state armaments producer Krušik—who alerted the media to potential high-level corruption and was arrested in September for revealing company trade secrets. Meanwhile, officials dragged their feet in investigating the corruptive acts and contracts brought to light by Obradović.

Over the years, the pull of European Union accession has provided an anchor for a variety of reforms and positive changes not just in Serbia but across the region. Even as the process of EU enlargement has slowed and waned, the prospect of eventual membership was at least a check on authoritarian tendencies in the region. Following the October European Council meeting, where France vetoed opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania while French President Emmanuel Macron suggested that enlargement would be put on hold, there is a real risk that, going into 2020, even this important brake is removed in countries like Serbia. Either way, the upcoming 2020 elections seem more likely to push Serbia into an even deeper crisis of democracy than resolve any issues.

National Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the democratic character of the governmental system; and the independence, 3.50 effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches. 7.00

- The state of democratic governance at the national level in Serbia remains at a historic albeit stable low. Power is heavily centralized in the hands of President Aleksandar Vučić, who, despite the very limited prerogatives invested in his office, maintains a tight grip over politics and the government through his control of the ruling SNS.
- In 2019, the Serbian government, led by Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, continued to operate as a vehicle for the president's will. Although constitutionally the government wields most executive powers in Serbia, it was clear throughout the year that President Vučić was making almost all important decisions in the country. Even individual ministers at times referred to receiving

direct instructions from Vučić. A case in point was the Minister of Labor, Employment, Veterans, and Social Affairs, who in December stated that the issue of the late payment of children's benefits had been resolved following a "direct order" from the president.¹ Vučić's central role was also reinforced by his overrepresentation in the media.²

- The absence of elections in 2019 gave political life a different dynamic compared to previous years, which had revolved around electoral campaigns. Still, public discourse continued to deteriorate during the year driven by the ruling party's efforts to discredit political debate. As an example, on April 11, Minister of Defense Aleksandar Vulin and Belgrade Deputy Mayor Goran Vesic announced that they, along with other SNS officials, would begin a hunger strike in protest at the supposed violence of antigovernment demonstrators.³ The threat was quickly withdrawn,⁴ but not before being ridiculed across much of the country.⁵
- In late January, most of the opposition parties began a boycott of parliamentary sessions. They cited allegations of severe and systematic abuse of parliamentary procedures by members of the ruling parties aimed at preventing the opposition from scrutinizing and amending legislation.⁶ On February 6, they put forward an "Agreement with the People" in which they pledged to fight jointly for media freedom and free and fair electoral conditions. The opposition coalition Alliance for Serbia (SzS) also pledged to boycott elections if conditions for a "fair" electoral process were not met.⁷ The boycott persisted, for the most part, through the end of the year.
- During the course of 2019, Serbia's EU accession process slowed down noticeably, with the country opening only two additional negotiating chapters.⁸ Meanwhile, the dialogue on normalizing relations with Kosovo all but ground to a halt. The presidents of Kosovo and Serbia, Hashim Thaci and Aleksandar Vučić, appeared to have refocused their efforts on negotiating an ethnically driven swap of territories as a way to resolve the long-running dispute between Belgrade and Pristina, yet the plan seemed to have been abandoned by the second half of the year.⁹

Electoral Process 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines national executive and legislative elections, the electoral framework, the 4.50 functioning of multiparty systems, and popular participation in the political process. 7.00

- National elections in Serbia broadly meet minimal democratic criteria and reflect the will of the people. However, during local electoral contests in the last few years, the prevalence of voter pressure and intimidation has called into question the democratic nature of the vote.¹⁰ Equally, the extent to which voter preferences are formed in a "free and fair" environment ahead of elections is questionable given the extensive control of media by the ruling SNS.¹¹
- In electoral terms, 2019 was an unusually quiet year. No nationwide elections took place, even though since 2012 four waves of elections had been held,¹² and a potential early vote was continuously on the agenda in 2019 as well. On April 16, for example, President Vučić stated that a decision on early elections would likely be deferred until his meetings with the leaders of China, Russia, Germany, and France but that the option would be kept on the table.¹³ Such discussions are an oft-deployed tactic by the SNS that crowds out other items from the news agenda. One potential reason for abandoning a vote could have been the increasingly credible threat by the opposition parties to boycott elections if held under existing terms.¹⁴
- Despite the absence of an actual vote, the issue of electoral conditions became one of the key political topics of 2019. Participants in the "1 of 5 million" demonstrations, which began as a general protest against violence in politics, quickly added "free and fair" elections to their demands.¹⁵ These were also backed by the largest opposition parties.
- In July, an unexpected meeting was held between representatives of the ruling SNS, opposition parties, and some democracy-focused NGOs.¹⁶ The meeting came after recommendations from a team of experts tasked by the "1 of 5 million" group to draw up proposals that would guarantee free and fair elections in Serbia,¹⁷ and it was the first in a five-round series of dialogues convened by the Serbian Open Society Fund and the Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences. The dialogue began in a tense atmosphere that quickly deteriorated. By late August, the SzS had abandoned the talks¹⁸; in mid-September, it proclaimed its decision to boycott parliamentary elections in the spring, arguing that a minimum of nine months was needed to establish free and fair conditions for holding elections.¹⁹
- Towards the end of August, David McAllister, then head of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, offered European assistance in mediating talks between the government and the opposition on election conditions.²⁰ The offer was renewed following the SzS decision to boycott upcoming elections but dismissed by SzS officials.²¹ Some opposition leaders argued that European officials were more concerned with preserving the legitimacy of a future SNS government than in actually helping to create conditions for the conduct of free and fair elections.²² Three rounds of dialogue mediated by members of the European Parliament in the fall were boycotted by all but a few small opposition parties,²³ and ultimately, the efforts produced little to no tangible results.

Civil Society 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses the organizational capacity and financial sustainability of the civic sector; the legal and political environment in which it operates; the functioning of trade unions; interest group participation in the policy process; and the threat posed by antidemocratic extremist groups. 5.50 7.00

- Serbia's civil sector remained energetic in 2019, reflected in the growing number of formally registered civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as the emergence of ad hoc groups gathered around political or environmental causes. Nevertheless, the sector as a whole continues to face pressure from the ruling elite and suffers from a lack of financial sustainability.
- The Serbian Business Registers Agency's records showed that, as of November 2019, there were more than 33,300 CSOs registered in Serbia, an increase of just over a thousand compared to 2018.²⁴ While this is considered a healthy number for a country of Serbia's population size, it likely includes many inactive organizations.
- The political and legal environment and financing for civil society groups continued to be a problem during the year. According to the 2018 CSO Sustainability Index,²⁵ the ability of CSOs to engage in advocacy and influence decision-making processes has deteriorated.²⁶ Additionally, the European Commission's 2019 Serbia report noted that "no progress was made towards establishing an enabling environment for the development and financing of civil society."²⁷
- The most energetic expression of civic activism during 2019 was the "1 of 5 million" protests against the incidents of political violence and growing authoritarianism in the country. The protests began in December 2018 and accelerated in early 2019.²⁸ During the first three months, the weekend protests attracted at least 10,000 people in the capital Belgrade—at times reaching two or three times that number—and also spread to dozens of other locations.²⁹ Crowds in smaller towns, where ordinary citizens were more fearful of voicing opposition, often numbered in the tens or hundreds. More than 1,200 individuals from the academic world gave their support to the protests.³⁰
- Initially, the "1 of 5 million" protests were more organic than formally organized, rallied by actors, public figures, and students in a spontaneous manner. With demonstrators expressing disgruntlement not just at ruling elites but also at the opposition, politicians were only marginally involved at first.³¹ It was not until March that political leaders began to take a more prominent role, particularly after demonstrators, led by Boško Obradović of the far-right Dveri, broke into and briefly occupied the building of public broadcaster RTS.³² By far the biggest protest was organized on April 13, in which tens of thousands gathered from across Serbia.³³ After this massive rally, the protests began to fizzle out, although a small group kept them going in Belgrade until the end of the year.³⁴
- Besides political demonstrations, environmental protests organized by ad hoc environmental organizations, local community groups, and individual activists also gained public attention. They were primarily concentrated in Serbia's rural southeast, in the Stara Planina mountainous region, where locals and activists protested against environmentally destructive development and the diversion of scarce water resources away from local communities.³⁵ Protesters often scuffled with private security and site workers but appeared to have some success in blocking construction projects.³⁶ Additionally, protests against excessive air pollution, similar to other Balkan countries, also took place throughout the year.³⁷

Independent Media 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines the current state of press freedom, including libel laws, harassment of journalists, and editorial independence; the operation of a financially viable and independent private press; and the functioning of the public media. 3.25 7.00

- As in past years, the media in Serbia continued in 2019 to function under pressure primarily from the government and ruling SNS. While the (already limited) number of independent media remained broadly stable, individual outlets and journalists faced political and financial pressure, as well as verbal and sometimes physical attacks. Serbian journalists held several protests demanding protection and an end to threats and pressure, but to little avail.³⁸
- A "game of shadows," in which government officials lamented the poor state of press freedoms yet would not admit their role in the problem, neatly summarizes the situation in 2019. In January, President Vučić said in a speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos that he was proud of Serbia's economic reforms but not of its media freedom. The speech was interpreted as hypocritical among observers in many quarters in Serbia.³⁹
- The process of adopting a media strategy was drawn out over the year. Although the working group tasked with drawing up the document had submitted a draft at the end of 2018,⁴⁰ the version the government shared with the European Commission in July 2019 was stripped of numerous safeguards. Prime Minister Brnabić said that someone in her cabinet had sent an altered version by mistake.⁴¹ The draft strategy was then sent back to Serbia for additional edits, with the working group presenting yet another version to the government. Representatives of journalist associations stressed that years had been squandered thanks to such government foot-dragging.⁴²

- On the ground, the life of ordinary journalists was much more precarious. On January 25, President Vučić stated that Dragoljub Simonović, then the SNS-appointed head of Grocka municipality, had been arrested for allegedly ordering the 2018 arson attack on the home of Milan Jovanović, an investigative journalist.⁴³ Simonović was eventually indicted for incitement to arson, although some experts questioned whether he should have been indicted for incitement to murder. In March, Simonović was released from detention, and while being ousted as municipal president, he was allowed to remain an SNS member. In parallel with his lawsuit, the politician also filed more than 15 libel suits against Jovanović and journalist and Zig Info owner Željko Matorčević.⁴⁴
- Examples of other threats and attacks against journalists abounded, most going unpunished. In early February, news channel N1 reported that it had received written death threats against its staff and their families.⁴⁵ In April, journalist Slobodan Georgiev from Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) was vilified as a "traitor" in a Twitter video, which also targeted other investigative media outlets.⁴⁶ In September, the prosecution dismissed charges against the alleged attacker who had left Matorčević with a broken cheekbone a year earlier.⁴⁷ At the same time, the sentencing of four people to up to 30 years in prison in April for gunning down prominent journalist Slavko Ćuruvija in 1999 was welcomed by international and local journalist organizations as an important step.⁴⁸
- Pressure on professional journalists within public broadcasters also continued. RTV journalist Žana Bulajić was removed from news production at the television station in March after a report on the lack of transparency in a concessionary contract for Belgrade Airport. Media organizations saw this as an act of censorship.⁴⁹
- Demonstrating Serbia's heated political situation, in March, a group of opposition leaders and "1 of 5 million" protesters stormed the public broadcaster RTS in Belgrade demanding to address the public live. Dveri politicians also blocked the entrance of RTS in November.⁵⁰

Local Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the decentralization of power; the responsibilities, election, and capacity of local governmental bodies; and the transparency and accountability of local authorities. 4.00 7.00

- The quality of local democratic governance in Serbia remains deficient, particularly regarding the accountability of local officials. The ruling SNS is in power in an overwhelming 158 out of 170 local municipalities, while the few opposition-run municipalities continued to come under strong government pressure.⁵¹
- Unusual for Serbia, local elections were held in 2019 in only one municipality, Medvedja. According to final results, turnout in this September vote was 68 percent, and the SNS party list *Aleksandar Vučić-Jer volim Medvedju* (Aleksandar Vučić-Because I Love Medvedja) won with 65 percent of the vote, taking 18 of the 25 local assembly seats. The Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and the Coalition Everyone for Medvedja won 2 seats each, while the Party of United Pensioners (PUPS), Party for Democratic Action (PDD), and Serbian Right won 1 mandate each.⁵²
- The opposition coalition SzS boycotted the elections, claiming conditions were incompatible with the conduct of free and fair elections, particularly given the poor state of the local voter register.⁵³ Local officials claimed that around 5,000 voters had to be removed from the register, practically halving the number of people eligible to vote.⁵⁴ The SzS representatives claimed that local residents were under duress to vote for the ruling SNS through a variety of threats.⁵⁵ They also accused President Vučić of abusing his official position by campaigning for the SNS; just days before the local elections, Vučić held a rally in Medvedja, promising infrastructure investments and new jobs.⁵⁶
- Various irregularities were reported, including the presence of black cars without license plates ahead of and on election day—widely seen as a tool used by the SNS to intimidate local voters—while Serbian Right posted a video clip on social media showing the printing of election ballots, something the party should not have been allowed to access.⁵⁷
- Allegations of intimidation and pressure on opposition-run municipalities pointed to a deteriorating political environment during the year, exemplified in Paracin. The head of the municipality, Saša Paunović, claimed that local police and prosecutors arrested municipal employees and threatened them with long prison sentences on trumped up charges unless they signed guilty pleas and statements. According to Paunovic, local rule-of-law institutions were used by the SNS to discredit the opposition-led municipal administration.⁵⁸
- In March, League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina (LSV) introduced a draft law in the Serbian Assembly guaranteeing funding for the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The stated aim of the draft law was to ensure that Vojvodina would receive adequate funds from the central state level, in line with the constitution, but the parliament rejected the draft.⁵⁹ Currently, the Vojvodina provincial budget is required to be at least 7 percent of the national budget. However, regional parties have complained that the process for calculating this funding has been detrimental to the autonomous province.⁶⁰

Judicial Framework and Independence 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses constitutional and human rights protections, judicial independence, the status of ethnic minority rights, guarantees of equality before the law, treatment of suspects and prisoners, and compliance with judicial decisions. 3.50 7.00

- In the course of 2019, no progress was made on reforms that aimed to improve the rule of law, or the efficiency and independence of the judiciary. Despite rhetorical commitments to reforming the justice system, particularly within the context of the EU accession process, lack of independence and professionalism are still the biggest problems facing Serbia's judicial system.
- The prEUgovor coalition—an alliance of CSOs monitoring progress in EU negotiations on Chapters 23 and 24 of the accession process—published monitoring reports in March and September 2019, both of which identified little or no progress in implementing reforms related to judicial independence, efficiency, or the rule of law other than updating existing action plans.⁶¹ The prEUgovor coalition was particularly critical of the process of adopting constitutional amendments, arguing that the draft amendments do not meet minimum standards for upholding judicial independence.⁶² Particularly problematic are clauses that would give the parliament a decisive role in filling positions on judicial councils, as well as a lack of guarantees for the independence of the future Judicial Academy, through which future judges must pass before assuming judicial positions.⁶³ Under government control, the Judicial Academy would become, in effect, a filter for ruling parties to control judicial appointments.
- Individual judges and judicial organizations that dare to criticize proposed changes in the judicial sector face public harangues from members of the ruling SNS and allied tabloids. Particular targets of such personal attacks during the year were Miodrag Majić and Omer Hadžimerović, both judges on the Belgrade Appeals Court. These attacks were condemned by the Association of Judges of Serbia.⁶⁴
- While efforts to pressure judges are often well hidden or disguised, one incident stood out in 2019. On October 23, judge Danijela Milojević of the Kuršumljia Basic Court requested that she be removed from a case in which the local mayor, Radoljub Vidić, was suing sports journalist Miloško Pantić for defamation. Milojević claimed that Vidić had exerted pressure on her family in the previous month and was responsible for her husband's loss of employment, causing "disturbance and insecurity" for her family.⁶⁵ Members of the Serbian Association of Judges called on the Prosecution to investigate the case.⁶⁶
- While attention is more often focused on judicial independence, prosecutors also complained of pressure and self-censorship. After several tabloids close to the SNS published accusations, members of the public prosecution service openly complained that the media were being used to attack prosecutors who had spoken out against problems within their profession. They added that the attacks encourage self-censorship and could impact investigations with potential links to politically connected individuals.⁶⁷

Corruption 1.00-7.00 pts

Looks at public perceptions of corruption, the business interests of top policymakers, laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest, and the efficacy of anticorruption initiatives. 3.50 7.00

- Although the current SNS-led government came to power in 2012 promising to battle Serbia's widespread corruption, the problem appears to have worsened, not improved, in the years since.
- The prEUgovor coalition monitoring report from September 2019 noted that, while there was some limited improvement in the legislative framework on fighting corruption at the beginning of the year, there was no notable progress in implementing the framework. On the contrary, the existing National Anticorruption Strategy expired at the end of 2018, and the fact that nine months later Serbia had no new strategy was clear evidence that fighting corruption was not a government priority. The report also noted numerous failures to adopt anticorruption-related legislation or take other measures, all of which suggest a lack of political will to tackle the problem.⁶⁸
- In March 2019, the Fiscal Council of Serbia, an independent government body, published a study examining reasons why Serbia's economic growth was below par, averaging just over 3 percent instead of a real potential of 5 percent. The Fiscal Council study showed that growth was around 1 percent lower due to weak rule of law and high corruption, while a lack of investment (public, private, and foreign) accounted for around 0.7 percent of subpar growth, particularly the lack of domestic private investment.⁶⁹
- Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) also suggested a deteriorating situation. While in 2016, Serbia was ranked 72nd globally (with 1st place indicating least corrupt and 176th most corrupt) and had a score of 42 (with zero indicating highly corrupt and 100 very clean),⁷⁰ in 2019 Serbia was ranked 91st in the world and had a score of 39.⁷¹ This was the country's lowest global ranking since 2006.
- As in past years, numerous corruption scandals, both large and small, rocked Serbia in 2019, but most passed without serious investigation or prosecution. These cases included accusations of graft against Predrag Mali, brother of Finance Minister Siniša Mali,⁷² and

corruption linked to gas pipelines in local municipalities.⁷³ During the summer, BIRN also published revelations about a network of Hungarian and Serbian companies with connections to the inner circles around Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Vučić, and Brnabić, which were winning the bulk of public lighting contracts in Serbia.⁷⁴

- One of the more disturbing cases was the fate of a whistleblower employed at the state-owned armaments factory Krušik in the town of Valjevo. From late 2018, several Serbian media outlets published revelations and allegations that Branko Stefanović, father of Serbian Interior Minister and senior SNS official Nebojša Stefanović, had used his influence to ensure that Krušik offered weapons for export to a private company at lower prices than were offered to other companies.⁷⁵ In October, the weekly *NIN* revealed that, on September 18, law enforcement authorities had arrested Aleksandar Obradović, the whistleblower from Krušik who had leaked information and documents to the Serbian media; Obradović was being investigated for breaking the law by revealing trade secrets.⁷⁶ Although Obradović was later released, the investigations into abuses at Krušik had yielded little or no results, let alone arrests, by the end of the year.

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Footnotes

- ¹ "Djordjević: Dobio sam naredjenje Vučića – rešen problem isplate dečijeg dodatka" [Djordjević: I received an order from Vučić – the problem of child benefit payments has been resolved], N1, 26 December 2019, <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a555757/Djordjevic-Dobio-sam-naredjenje-Vuči...>
- ² Omer Karabeg, "Ima li Vučić 'dvojnika'?", Radio Slobodna Evropa, 7 July 2019, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/most-Vučić-dvojnika/30040526.html> ;
- ³ "Vulin i Vesić najavili da će štrajkovati gladju", Danas, 11 April 2019, <https://www.danas.rs/politika/vulin-i-vesic-najavili-da-ce-strajkovati-...> ; "Odbornička grupa SNS u Čačku najavila štrajk gladju, pa otkazala" [Local Assembly SNS group in Cacak announced hunger strike, then cancelled it], Danas, 12 April 2019, <https://www.danas.rs/politika/odbornicka-grupa-sns-u-cacku-najavila-str...> ;
- ⁴ Ljudmila Cvetković, Branka Trivić, "Umesto štrajka gladju, dežurstvo u parlamentu Srbije" [Instead of hunger strike, on duty in the Serbian Parliament], Radio Slobodna Evropa, 12 April 2019, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/29877412.html> ; "Vulin: Razgovarao sam sa svojim saborcem Vučićem i odlučio da odložim štrajk" [Vulin: I talked to my comrade Vučić and decided to defer the strike], Danas, 12 April 2019, <https://www.danas.rs/politika/vulin-razgovarao-sam-sa-svojim-saborcem-V...>
- ⁵ Davor Lukač, "Prvi put u istoriji – Štrajk gladju vlasti zbog opozicije: Spasavanje redova Vulina" [First time in history – Hunger strike of government due to opposition: Saving private Vulin], Vreme, 18 April 2019, <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1683414>
- ⁶ Lana Gedošević "Većina opozicije danas je bojkotovala parlament, a da li bi totalni bojkot bio dobra odluka?" [Most of the opposition today boycotted Parliament, but would total boycott be a good decision?], Blic, 28 January 2019, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/vecina-opozicije-danas-je-bojkotoval-...> ; "Poslanici opozicije bojkotuju sednice parlamenta Srbije", Radio Slobodna Evropa, 11 February 2019, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/29763382.html> ; "Opozicija: Bojkot parlamenta do normalizacije rada" [Opposition: Boycot of Parliament until normalization of work], Danas, 13 February 2019, <https://www.danas.rs/politika/opozicija-bojkot-parlamenta-do-normalizac-...> ; Mirjana R. Milenković, "Opozicija nastavlja bojkot" [Opposition continues boycott], Danas, 5 March 2019, <https://www.danas.rs/politika/opozicija-nastavlja-bojkot/>
- ⁷ "Šta piše u ugovoru sa narodom: Opozicija objavila predlog sporazuma, evo na šta su se sve obavezali u 7 tačaka" [What is written in the agreement with the people: Opposition publishes agreement, here is what they have committed themselves in 7 points], Blic, 6 February 2019, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/sta-pise-u-ugovoru-sa-narodom-opozic-...> ; Dušan Komarčević, "Vučić u kampanji, opozicija pred bojkotom" [Vučić campaigning, opposition on the brink of boycott], Radio Slobodna Evropa, 7 February 2019, [https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-opozicija-Vučić-sporazum-s-naro...](https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-opozicija-Vučić-sporazum-s-naro-...)
- ⁸ "Srbija u Briselu otvorila još jedno poglavlje" [Serbia opens another chapter in Brussels], RTS, 27 June 2019, <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/3571969/pocela-medju-...> ; "Srbija otvorila novo poglavlje u pregovorima sa EU" [Serbia opens new chapter in negotiations with EU], RTS, 10 December 2019, <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/3769454/srbija-otvor-...>

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- [11](#) For example, the CRTA report on the 2018 Belgrade elections notes that, when it comes to the media, the election campaign cannot be considered free and fair: "Beogradski izbori 2018: Finalni izveštaj CRTA posmatračke misije", CRTA, 2018, p.51, <https://crt.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CRTA-BG-izbori-finalni-izves...> . See also the media section of the OSCE report on the conduct of the 2016 Parliamentary elections: "Republic of Serbia: Early Parliamentary Elections 24 April 2016", OSCE/ODIHR, 29 July 2016, p.12-15, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/serbia/256926?download=true>
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- [26](#) 2018 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia", USAID, p.205, available at: <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource-cso...> Declines were also noted when it came to CSO service provision in Serbia, as well as sectoral infrastructure supporting the sector, the later primarily due to the end of a EU-funded technical assistance program. While financial viability improved somewhat (in part thanks to a recalibration of the score), the legal environment in which CSOs operate deteriorated slightly for the fourth time in a row.
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