

## COVID-19: Serbian Government Must Guarantee Free Flow of Information

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<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/covid-19-serbian-government-must-guarantee-free-flow-of-information.html>

Serbian Prime Minister, Ana Brnabic, withdrew a planned decree that would have limited the publishing of information related to COVID-19 just to official sources on 2 April. The International and European Federation of Journalists (IFJ and EFJ) welcome the U-turn by the government and urges the authorities to respect the free flow of information and not to arrest journalists for their reports on COVID-19.



*Credit: Wikimedia Commons National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia*

The Serbian government had on 28 March passed a decree stating that only the Prime Minister or individuals authorized by the Crisis Management Taskforce could release information about the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the government, the decision was intended to fight against fake news about the pandemic.

However, the decree was strongly criticized by OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir and media groups, as it was a flagrant attempt to limit media reporting about the health crisis.

A few days after, the Serbian Prime Minister, Ana Brnabic, announced the dropping of the decree following international pressure.

Serbian media workers are going through difficult times. Since the beginning of the pandemic, at least two journalists have been detained and had their equipment seized. Nova.rs journalist Ana Lalic was detained on 1 April and held for 48 hours “*for causing panic and unrest*” after publishing a story on the poor conditions of the Clinical Center of Vojvodina.

Zrenjanin’s KTV crew Daniel Radic and Robert Bajtaiju were detained on 28 March for “*violating the measures*” announced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The police still have their equipment.

The IFJ and EFJ expressed deep concerns over the media situation in Serbia and stressed that the government is bound by its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, especially with respect to freedom of opinion and expression, and media freedom.

Together with their affiliates in Serbia, SINOS, UNS and NUNS, the IFJ and EFJ urge the Serbian authorities to guarantee a safe environment for journalists to do their job independently and to provide the citizens with free and public interest information at such a critical moment.