

Chronicle of Repression in Culture – Summary (November/December 2025)

With the launch of the Chronicle of Repression in Culture in November 2025, the Community of Arts and Culture [in Serbian, Zajednica umetnosti i kulture – ZUK] – an informal collective of workers across different fields of cultural production in Serbia, established during the particular context in 2025 – seeks to create a shared space for exchanging knowledge about regime repression towards the cultural sector in the country. In doing so, ZUK aims to prevent cultural workers and artists from being confined to individual struggles, as well as to counter our continued isolation and atomization. By documenting cases of political retaliation, we assume the role of collective witnesses, with the intention that such cases are neither silenced nor forgotten, but instead serve to foster solidarity, mutual connection, and support.

A questionnaire made available to colleagues aimed to collect testimonies regarding experiences of intimidation, threats, coercion, dismissals, censorship, as well as the withdrawal of financial support or the right to work for those who joined the wave of mass protests in Serbia during 2024 and 2025. In addition to numerous well-known cases involving violations of freedom of expression and assembly, the right to work, and breaches of law in the field of culture and cultural heritage, during the one-month period from 15 November to 15 December 2025, ZUK collected 37 additional reports of lesser-known cases of repression within the domestic cultural sector.

The complete report in the Serbian language can be accessed [here](#).

The forms and methods of repression were diverse. Particularly notable were problems in the implementation of public calls and competitions, as well as manipulations related to the appointment of directors and managers of cultural institutions. In six cases, dismissals or threats of dismissal were reported, while five cases involved blackmail. Testimonies also point to a specific form of repression: the actions of local ruling party commissioners who intimidate politically non-compliant staff.

Internal regulatory acts, such as statutes and job classification systems, were amended, among other reasons, to enable the employment of politically loyal candidates without appropriate qualifications, or to dismiss disobedient employees, as in the case of the Theatre of the town of Šabac. At the National Theatre in Belgrade, a new Rulebook on Work Discipline, Employee Conduct, and Compensation for Damages was adopted on 25 September 2025, stripping employees of numerous human, labor, and artistic rights. Similar acts were adopted in certain museums, requiring written approval from directors for all meetings, protocol visits, free exhibition tours, and media statements. “Disobedient” employees in cultural institutions across the country have been discredited, sabotaged, subjected to insults and humiliation, while false information about their work has been disseminated.

The largest number of reported cases concerned direct censorship – namely, the cancellation of previously scheduled programs due to the participation of politically undesirable actors or the subject matter of the program. At the same time, “blacklists” function as an effective mechanism of repression precisely because they are invisible to the wider public and their existence is denied. Directors warn collaborators to carefully monitor what they say during program openings, editorial autonomy is

undermined, and the quality and continuity of work in public cultural institutions are significantly compromised.

Renovation works or the closure of buildings under the pretext of fire safety represent a previously rare form of suppression of freedom of expression. The National Theatre in Belgrade proved to be an example of this silencing mechanism. In other institutions, employees were threatened with closure of the institution and the dismissal of entire ensembles should protests continue.

The independent cultural scene has faced a specific form of external mobbing and pressure, manifested through lawsuits, financial inspections, extraordinary audits of co-financed projects, and excessive administrative burdens. Following public support for student protests, the allocation of public spaces to certain civil society organizations within public institutions was challenged or discontinued. In multiple reports, the survival of independent scene organizations—particularly those oriented toward social critique and engagement—has been called into question. Even representative arts associations, such as Association of the Visual Artists of Serbia [ULUS], point out that not only their regular programs but their very existence is under threat.

Colleagues who have been unjustly and unlawfully dismissed suffer severe consequences—the livelihoods of their families are endangered, in some cases urgently, while their psychological and physical health, dignity, and personal integrity are seriously compromised. Among younger artists who were censored for supporting the student movement, there is a noticeable level of fear regarding the long-term impact of censorship on their careers, which are still in their formative stages. This situation contributes to the emigration of cultural workers and artists abroad, in search of opportunities for at least minimal autonomous work free from political coercion.

As actors across all sectors of cultural production generally lack the capacity to initiate private lawsuits, numerous violations of laws and regulations remain unsanctioned. The consequences of repression are borne exclusively by cultural workers and organizations themselves, while the question of accountability remains unresolved. Due to negative experiences with public calls for funding, many artists withdraw from participation altogether, further exposing public cultural funds to abuse. Nevertheless, some employees in cultural institutions systematically document violations and criminal offenses, pointing to the collapse of the legal system. Thus, according to employees of the Užice National Theatre, as many as 278 violations of the Constitution, laws (on labor, culture, anti-discrimination, public services, the budget system, etc.), as well as internal regulatory acts, have been identified.

The Community of Arts and Culture [ZUK] will continue collecting testimonies on repression in the cultural sector and will periodically publish new reports.