

## Science Conducted in Public under Clandestine Attack

Call for solidarity:

**The Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory in Belgrade is in danger**

The renowned Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory Belgrade (IFDT) has a long history of liberal thinking. Founded by dissident intellectuals expelled from the university for their involvement in the Yugoslav 1968 movement, it was, in the 1990s, at the forefront of the opposition to the policies of Slobodan Milošević. Zoran Đinđić, philosopher and the first Serbian head of government in the post-Milošević era, who was assassinated while in power in 2003, had worked at this Institute for several years.

The IFDT is now, it seems, to be put on a political leash. The Serbian government has appointed a new Governing Board that includes several highly controversial political figures. For example, Zoran Avramović, the nominated President of the Board, was promoted to official leading positions in the Ministry of Education by the right-wing Radical Party of Vojislav Šešelj (who was sentenced by the Hague Tribunal). Avramović has already intimated what he thinks of the institute when he urged for suspension of financing for the IFDT Regional Centre in Novi Sad. The current Acting Director uses repressive measures that indicate what the future of the institute will look like (threats to suspend salaries, attempts to curb the freedom of the Institute's Scientific Council, junior researchers put under pressure, international projects suspended, etc.).

Democracy, and specifically the scientific and education landscape in Serbia, is increasingly under threat. There are few remaining free media. The current attempt to muzzle and perhaps even eliminate an autonomous academic institution like IFDT further weakens Serbian democracy. What is more, these attempts are being conducted as quietly as possible because publicity in this matter does not suit either the politically installed Governing Board or the Serbian Government. Freedom of opinion and freedom of science must be defended through European solidarity of colleagues and intellectuals. This was once already the case when, in 1980, Jürgen Habermas, Iring Fetscher, Oskar Negt and Albrecht Wellmer successfully called for support for the founders of the Institute by addressing the then Yugoslav and Serbian authorities directly, thus helping the founding of the Institute. Who would have thought that in 2020 philosophy and social theory in Serbia would again have to be defended from the state?

Given this development, we the undersigned, demand the immediate replacement of the IFDT Governing Board with scientific experts, namely representatives of an open and democratic scientific culture; we demand respecting the wishes of the Institute researchers and employees in electing the new Institute Director. Further, the Serbian government must not be allowed to impose a new head of the IFDT by decree. The institute must be allowed to regain its political and institutional independence. If the Serbian government seriously supports democratization and wants to position itself as a reliable candidate for EU membership, it will withdraw from this attempt of political control.

***If you want to support this Call for Solidarity, please contact Ljubisa Bojic [ljubisa.bojic@gmail.com] (former member of the Triangle Lab, doctor of political science from Sciences Po Lyon).***

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